

ALGHAZALI THE BOOK OF VIGILANCE AND SELF-EXAMINATION

BOOK XXXVIII of THE REVIVAL OF THE RELIGIOUS SCIENCES

In the Name of God, Most Compassionate and Merciful

PRAISE BE TO GOD who grants every soul what it has earned; who watches every perpetrator of outrage, who fathoms the innermost recesses of the hearts and best reckons the thoughts stirring inside his servants. Not an atom's weight in heaven and earth, whether in motion or rest, escapes His knowledge. He tallies every fleck and speckle, every deed great or small however concealed. He deigns to accept the good works of worshippers, however scant, extending forgiveness for their sins, however numerous.

Yet, He shall take them to account, that every soul may learn what it has fetched, and see what she offered and withheld that the soul may know that without vigilance and self-examination in this world it is but wretched and ruined on the open plain of Resurrection. Even after striving, self-examination and vigilance, if not for God's kindly acceptance of the soul's medley offerings, she would be discomfited and defeated.

Exalted then is He whose grace embraces and comprehends every servant and in whose mercy is immersed utterly submerged every created being in this world and the next.

Hearts are distended and opened for faith through the gifts of God's grace. Through the good fortune of His success (*tawfiq*), the limbs are bound to acts of worship and discipline. In the beauty of His guidance (*hidaya*), the darkness of ignorance is dispelled and banished. Through His support (*ta'yid*) and aid (*nusra*) are the devil's ruses foiled.

By the gentleness of His solicitude (*'inaya*) most good deeds become preponderant upon weighing. And He facilitates what good works are facilitated. From God [every] gift, every reward, every banishing or drawing nigh, every cause for happiness and distress.

Prayers upon Muhammad, leader of the prophets; and upon his household, the masters of the pure; and upon his Companions, the exemplars of the God-fearing.

Now, God has said, We shall place scales of justice for the Day of Resurrection, so that not a soul shall be treated unjustly. There is not a mustard seed too small that we shall not bring it forth, for We are the best keepers of accounts .

And the Book will be laid down and thou wilt see the evildoers dreading what is in it, saying: 'Woe to us! What a book this is! It leaves out nothing small or great but reckons it.' They shall before them find all they have done. But thy Lord is unjust to no one .

God said, on the day when God shall raise them all in order to inform them of their doing. For God reckons [what they have done], though they will have forgotten it for God is witness to everything .

On that day will people emerge in all their varieties to be shown their deeds. Whoever has done an atom's weight of good shall see it. Whoever has done an atom's weight of evil shall see it .

Then will every soul be requited for what it earned, and none shall be treated unjustly .

On the day when every soul shall surely find what good it has done and what evil it has done. Its wish will be to be far from the latter. For God cautions ye about Himself.

And know that God knows what you harbour inside. Therefore, beware of Him .

Of all people, those with insight (arbab al-absar) will know that God is ever-watchful over them,*10 and that they shall be questioned at the Reckoning and that they will be liable for trifling motes of thoughts and glances. They realise that nothing will save them from those perils but perseverance in self-examination and true vigilance and questioning the soul about breaths and movements and examining her thoughts and glances. Who ever examines himself before he is brought to examination, his own account will be lighter at the Resurrection. He shall have his answer when questioned, a good final destiny and return. He who fails to examine himself, his sorrows shall endure. At the courts of Resurrection his haltings shall lengthen his misdeeds having led him to ignominy and odium.

When this is revealed [to the people of insight], they come to know that nothing but obedience to God will save them from it. God enjoined upon them patience (sabr) and steadfast commitment (murabata). He said, O ye faithful, have patience, bear up and make a steadfast commitment [to perform the good]. So, they

As if from a watchtower. This rendering refers us back to the quasi-military concepts of rihat and murabata, which sometimes included watchtowers and even the minarets of mosques.

I have chosen to translate murabata, a difficult term, as 'steadfast commitment'. Ghazali's choice of words is not coincidental. In the field of ethics, the

concept of *murdqaba* (vigilance) is closely associated with *murabata* and *rihat* literally, 'mounting for battle' (see Introduction). Abu Hafs 'Umar al-Suhrawardi (d. 2 /1234) suggested that *rihat*, 'that with which horses are attached', implies that the *murdbit* is the frontiersman who seeks to repel what lies 'farther out' (Kitdb al- 'aivdrif 104). Figuratively, this would make of *rihat* a struggle against the self (*jihad al-nafs*); the *murdbit* would be whoever fights against his own self (*murdbit mujahid nafsihi*) (105). In fact, the 'real' *ribdt* consisted of observances of a rehgio-spiritual, rather than a military, character or some other purely physical aspect. According to 'Abd Allah b. al-Mubarak, *rihat* is 'the striving against the self and the passions' (*mujahadat al-nafs wal-hawa*), referring to the 'greater *jihad*', and that this is 'the truth about *jihad*' (*haqq al-jihad*) (105). This view is commonly understood to be based on the Prophet's saying, 'We returned from the lesser *jihad* to the greater *jihad*' (*ibid.*).

committed themselves, first, by agreeing upon the conditions (*musharata*), A then with vigilance (*muraqaba*), self-examination (*muhasaba*), punishment (*muaqaba*), renewed striving (*mujahada*) and, [finally,] censure (*muataba*).

Thus, in steadfast commitment (*murabata*) they have six stations. The explanation of these, the exposition of their essences and merits, the elaboration of the deeds they imply and the root (*asl*) of this self-examination are all necessary.

Now, before every accounting (*hisab*) there is the setting of conditions (*musharata*) and vigilance (*muraqaba*). Upon forfeiture, this is followed by censure (*muataba*) and punishment (*muaqaba*).

Let us then explain these stations and through God is our success.

CHAPTER ONE

The First Station of Steadfast Commitment: Agreeing Upon the Conditions

KNOW THAT WHEN those who engage in commerce and deal in commodities settle accounts they seek a healthy profit. Hence, the trader avails himself of his associate, handing him money for the trade and then settling his account with him. It is the same with the intellect (*'aql*) as it does commerce on the way to the Hereafter. Its object and profit is the purification of the soul, because its felicity is through this.

Said God Exalted, He is truly felicitous who purifies [his soul] and

he fails who corrupts it . The soul's felicity is through good works. The intellect avails itself of the soul in this trade because it uses the soul and subjugates it to what will purify it, just as the trader avails himself of his associate and servant, who trades with [the trader's] money.

Now, as the other party can be adversarial, disputing and rivalling him for profit, first, he needs to agree on the conditions; second, to be vigilant with him; third, to call him to account; and, fourth, to punish or censure him . By the same token, the intellect first needs to set the conditions for the soul (musharatat al-nafs); then to assign tasks to it, lay down the conditions, guide it to the paths of felicity and force it to undertake such paths without for a single moment neglecting to keep vigilant over it. Whenever, on the other hand, the intellect neglects the soul it will find nothing but disloyalty in it and the loss of capital just like the disloyal servant who, left at liberty, may abscond with the money.

When all is spoken for, [the intellect] has to call the soul to account and demand that it fulfil what conditions he has imposed upon it. For, the gain of this commerce is the highest paradise (al-firdaws al-ala), the arrival at the lote-tree (sidrat al-muntaha) with the prophets and those who bear witness. Meticulous self-accounting is far more important in this [respect] than [meticulousness] in worldly gains, insignificant as these are in comparison with the [ultimate] end of felicity. For whatever they may be, they are destined to end and to cease. There is no good in an ephemeral good. On the contrary, an ephemeral evil is better than an ephemeral good, because once the ephemeral evil ceases an enduring joy comes with the interruption the evil having ended. Whereas the ephemeral good, once interrupted, becomes continual regret once the good ends.

This is why it is said,

The greatest distress for me is in joy,

Certain it will turn is he who possesses it

It behoves every resolute person with faith in God and the Last Day not to omit calling his soul to account to restrict its movements and repose, thoughts and steps. For, every breath of life is a precious gem that has no substitute. One may purchase with it a treasure the felicity of which is everlasting . The expiry of these breaths, when they are forfeited or wasted on what only procures ruin, is a great and stupendous loss which no reasonable soul can permit.

Thus rising in the morning, his morning duties discharged ,

the servant of God ought to devote his heart for a while to setting the conditions (musharata) for his soul. Just as the trader, upon handing over the goods to the person with whom he trades, reserves the meeting to laying down the conditions for him. [The servant of God] should say to his soul, 'The only commodity I have is my life. As it dissipates so does the capital, and therewith the hope of trade and the search for gain. On this new day God has granted me respite and delayed my appointed time. He has graced me this. Should He take me back to Him, I would wish that He return me to the world for just a day to rectify my error in that. [O my soul,] know you will die and will be brought back [to your Lord]. And so beware, O beware of losing this day, as each breath is but a priceless jewel. O my soul, know that a day and night are twenty-four hours.'

As one report says: For every day and night, the servant of God will be shown twenty-four vaults, the one ranged after the other/ When one vault opens for him , he finds it filled with the light of the good works he performed during that hour. He is granted joy and happiness and delight at witnessing these lights his access to the Almighty King. Were this joy to be dispensed to the people of Hell they would no longer feel the pain of the fire. Another dark, sombre vault opens up for the servant, diffusing its stench and shrouding him with its darkness, this being the hour when he disobeyed God. His only award will be terror and alarm. Should the people of Paradise be allotted these, their paradisaal pleasures would surely be spoiled. Then another, empty vault opens for the servant of God, [this time] bringing him nothing that either pleases or displeases him . This is the hour when he slept or was absent-minded or preoccupied with something of this world which is merely permissible. Its emptiness distresses him . Here, he feels cheated in the same way that a person capable of great gains and possessions feels when he is so neglectful and careless that he forfeits them. Suffice it to mention only the distress and the disillusion. This is how the vaults of every moment of his lifetime will be exposed to him .

[The servant of God] will then tell his soul, 'Endeavour today to replenish your vaults, and do not let them be empty of the treasures which occasion your wealth. Do not incline towards idleness, meekness or slackness. Else, you will miss what others may perceive of the loftiest heights , and all you shall have is distress, from which you will not separate even if you enter Paradise. For the pain of the disillusion and the distress is unbearable even without the torment of the fire.'

Someone once said, 'Suppose the offender is forgiven. Will he not have missed out on the reward of the righteous?' He was alluding to the disillusion and the distress. Said God, The day that assembles you for the Day of the Assembly that is the day of mutual

disillusion .

That, then, is [the servant of God's] counsel to his soul about the moments [of his life]; after which he proffers counsel about his seven members the eye, ear, tongue, stomach, pudenda, hands and foot handing them over to her. For these are the subjects at the service of the soul in this commerce. Through them its commercial dealings are carried out. Verily, hell has seven doors each [leading] to a separate division. These doors are designated to him who disobeys God through these members and so [he] counsels [the soul] to guard against their disobedience.

The eye. One ought to guard it from looking at the face of someone who is not a close relation (mahram) or towards the faultiness ('awra) of a Muslim, or looking condescendingly at a Muslim in short, against every unwarranted inquisitiveness. For God shall question His servant as much about excessive gawking as for excessive speech.

When the servant turns his eye away from such it will only be satisfied if he preoccupies it with whatever pertains to its own commerce and gain. [The eye] was created to gaze at the wonders of God's design with consideration; to gaze at the good works for [the purpose of] emulation; to gaze at the Book of God and the way of His Messenger and to study the books of wisdom from which to take admonition and benefit.

This is how the case of each and every [bodily] member, especially the tongue and stomach [below], ought to be elaborated.

The tongue. [We include] the tongue because it is loose by nature and has no trouble moving great is its surreptitious felony! Among the issues we mentioned in the Book of the Defects of the Tongue A were mendacity, calumny, exculpation of oneself, disapproval of people and foods, cursing, execration of foes, and prolixity, etc. [The tongue] has to do with all of this. And yet, it is created for invoking [God], remembrance, reiterating knowledge, teaching, guiding the servants of God to His path, reconciling people and other benefits. [The servant of God] must make it conditional upon the soul that it move the tongue during the day only in invocation [of God]. Thus, the utterance of the believer becomes an invocation, his gaze an admonition [for him], his silence a contemplation. And not a word does he utter than a watchful sentinel shall [stand] by him at the ready .

The stomach. [The servant of God] imposes on it the abandonment of gluttony, the reduction in the eating of licit [food] and the avoidance of what is doubtful. He forbids it appetites, sets forth the limit according to necessity, lays down the condition that if the soul negates any of this it shall, in punishment, be

denied the indulgences of the stomach, and therefore it will miss out on more than it gained through its appetites.

In like manner, [the servant of God] sets down the conditions for the soul 14 with respect to all the members. To investigate all this would be lengthy, for the transgressions and acts of piety 15 of the bodily members are already clear.

[The servant of God] then resumes counselling [the soul] on the regular pious duties he repeats day and night which are then followed by the supererogatory tasks he is capable of and can multiply. He arranges their particularities and modes, and how to prepare for each.

These are conditions he needs every day. Yet, if man accustoms his soul to their imposition for a few days and his soul consents to make good on all, he can dispense with the setting of conditions (musharata). If he is obeyed in some, then the need to repeat the conditions for the rest remains; although every day brings forth a new concern, [some] current event calling for a new verdict, and God has a right over him in all. This is all the more [true] of those who are preoccupied with a worldly act due to governing, trading or teaching. For seldom comes a day without a new event [requiring] him to apply God's right upon it. Therefore, it is incumbent upon the servant to impose uprightness on his soul [in these matters] and the obligation to truth in its progress and to caution it about the outcome of neglect. He [must] admonish it as one admonishes the insubordinate runaway servant. For the soul is by nature refractory to pious acts, rebellious against servanthood. Nevertheless, admonitions and discipline have their effect on it and remind [people], for remembrance avails the faithful .

This and what is similar to it is the first station of steadfast commitment in relation to the soul. It is self-examination before the act ; 18 self-examination is sometimes after the act, sometimes before it for the purpose of cautioning. Said God, Know that God knows what is in your souls and take warning from Him . That is for the future.

Every consideration of quantity and measure aims to know what is more and what is less, and is called self-examination. God's servant reflects on what he encounters in the course of his day in order to tell his additions from his omissions through self-examination.

Said God, O ye faithful, when ye taketh the path of God be exacting ; 29 O ye faithful, if an immoral person comes to you with an announcement, be exacting ; 21 We have created man, and We know how his soul prompts him . God mentioned this to caution and counsel prudence in the future.

Tbada b. al-Samit related that the Prophet (may God bless him

and grant him peace) had admonished someone who had asked him for advice, 'When you encounter something, ponder its consequences. If it is well-advised, endorse it. If it is offensive, desist from it.'

A learned man said, 'If you want that the intellect to prevail over passion, then do not act upon the appetite until you look into the consequence. For regrets dwell longer in the heart than the levity of appetite.'

Said Luqman, 'Seeing the consequence preserves the faithful from regret.'

Shaddad b. Aws related that the Prophet (may God bless him and grant him peace) said, 'He is astute who subjugates his soul and acts for what lies beyond death. He is foolish who lets his soul follow its appetites and then wishes for God' + where subjugates his soul' means 'calls it to account.' The Day of Religion* is the day of reckoning. [In the Qur'an] it is asked, Have we a debt owed? in other words, are we called to account?

Said 'Umar [b. al-Khattab], 'Call yourselves to account before being called to account. Weigh yourselves before being weighed. Make ready for the greatest [Day of] Judgement.' 5 He wrote to Abu Musa al-Ashari, 'Call yourself to account in comfort [while you can] before the accounting is severe.' 6

He asked Ka'b [al-Ahbar], B 'How do you view [the matter of the soul] in God's Book?' 7 And he added, 'Woe unto the earthly creditor from the Heavenly Creditor!' raising the scourge at him, 'save he who calls his own soul to account.'

Replied Ka'b, 'O Commander of the Faithful, [your word] is identical to what is in the Torah. There is not a letter different between the two ; 28 [the Torah says:] he who calls his own soul to account.'

All this indicates accounting for the future, for [the Prophet] said, '[He] who subjugates his soul acts for what lies beyond death ...,' which implies first of all weighing matters, then assessing them, studying, planning, then embarking upon and implementing them.

CHAPTER TWO

The Second Steadfast
Commitment: Vigilance

IF MAN PRESCRIBES and makes conditional upon his soul what has been mentioned above, then nothing remains but to be vigilant with it when it rushes to actions and to scrutinise it with a watchful eye. For, [the soul] abandoned commits transgression and corruption.

Let us discuss the merit of vigilance and then its degrees.

The Merit of Vigilance

Regarding the merit [of vigilance], Gabriel was asked about the doing of good (ihsan). A He replied, 'Worshipping God as if you were looking at Him.' The Prophet said, 'Worship God as if you were looking at Him. Though you see Him not, He sees you.'

Said God, Is He not then the One who watches over everything which the soul earns ? 2 Knoweth he not that God doth see ? 3 For God examines thee ; 4 And those who respect their trusts and covenants and those who uphold their testimonies .

Ibn al-Mubarak once said to a man, 'Watch ye God (Exalted is He)!' The man asked him to explain his view. 'Act always as if you saw God Almighty and Majestic,' replied Ibn al-Mubarak.

Said Abd al-Wahid b. Zayd, 'When my master watches me I take notice of nothing else.'

A Ihsan implies improvement, perfection and other allied meanings, not just a blanket 'doing the good'. This is especially true in Sufism.

Abu 'Uthman al-Maghribi said that the best thing which man demands of himself is self-examination and vigilance, and to manage his actions through knowledge .

Said Ibn Ata, 'The best act of piety is continual vigilance at every moment over the truth.'

Said Jurayri, 'Our affairs are built on two principles: that you keep your soul vigilant for the sake of God and that you manifestly uphold knowledge.'

Said Abu Uthman [al-Nisaburi] that Abu Haf's [Amr b. Maslama] told him, 'When you sit with people, admonish your self and your heart. Be not beguiled by their gathering, for they examine only your exterior while God examines your interior.' 0

It is told that a learned master of this community had a young

pupil whom he used to honour and promote. A friend of his then asked him, 'How could you honour someone so young when we are [his] elders?' So, he asked for several birds. He gave each of [his friends] a bird and a knife, saying, 'Let each of you slaughter his bird at a place none can see you.' He handed the same to the youth, telling him what he had told the others.

Everyone returned with his slaughtered bird, but the youth returned with the live bird in hand. He was asked, 'Why have you not slaughtered as your friends have slaughtered?'

'I found no place where no one could see me,' he said, 'for God saw me everywhere.' They commended him for being so watchful, saying, 'Right you are, may you be honoured .' 1

It is told that when Zulaykha was alone with Yusuf, she stood up and covered the face of an idol of hers . Yusuf asked her, 'What is the matter? Are you shamed by the leer of the inanimate (muraqahat al-asnam) and I should not be by the watchful gaze of the almighty King ?' 3

One tradition tells of a young lad who had been seducing a servant-girl. She told him, 'Are you not ashamed?'

He replied, 'Ashamed from whom? Who can see us but the stars?'

'But what of their Maker?' she said .

A man asked Junayd, 'What can help me avert my gaze (ghad al-basar)V A

'With your knowledge that the sight of the One who sees you precedes your view of whatever you see .' 5

Said Junayd, 'He will verily obtain confirmation through vigilance who fears losing his share from his Lord Almighty and Majestic .' 6

Said Malik b. Dinar , 'The Gardens of Eden are among the Gardens of Firdaws. In them are hur created from the flowers of Paradise.'

He was asked, 'And who inhabits it?'

'God Almighty and Majestic says, "Those who inhabit the Gardens of Eden are those who, about to sin, remember my majesty and, thus, heed Me. They bend over backwards from fear of Me, My might and majesty. For I care about the suffering of the earth's inhabitants. When I see those who hunger and thirst for

fear of Me, I avert the punishment ('adhah) from them .' 8

When Muhasibl was asked about vigilance, he said, 'It begins with the heart's knowledge of the proximity of the Lord .' 9

Said Murta 'ish, 'Vigilance is attending to one's secret [interior] in order to be 20 wary of what lies hidden at every moment and with every utterance .' 1

It is told that God said to His angels, 'You have been charged with the exterior, while I watch over the interior .' 2

Said Muhammad b. All al-Tirmidhi, 'Examine yourself before the One who ever sees you. Offer gratitude to the One whose blessings to you never cease. Be obedient to the One you cannot but need. Show humility to the One whose dominion and power you cannot escape .' 3

Said Sahl [al-Tustari], 'The heart is adorned with nothing better or nobler than the servant's knowledge that God sees him as he is .' 4

Someone said that these words of God, God well pleased with them and they with Him all this for such as fear his Lord , referred to one who heeds his Lord, examines and equips himself for the Hereafter.

Dhu al-Nun was asked, 'How does the servant attain to Paradise?' He answered, 'With five [traits]: Uprightness (istiqama) with no prevarication, striving (ijthad) without distraction, being vigilant of God Exalted both secretly and openly, expectation of death and readiness for it, self-examination before being taken to account.'

It is said:

If you are free for a day in time say not: I am free,
but say: I have someone watching over me.

Think neither that God hath forgotten an hour
nor that what ye concealed from Him is absent.
Do you not see that the day is faster in coming,
that tomorrow it is near to those that await it.

Said Humayd al-Tawil to Sulayman b. 'All al- 'Uzni, 'Teach me.' He said, 'If you disobey God in isolation without knowing that God sees you, then you have committed a grave sin. But if you surmise that He sees you not, then you have rejected Him (, kafarta).'

Said Sufyan al-Thawri, 'You must be vigilant of the One from

whom nothing is hidden. You must be expectant of the One who fulfils. You must beware of the One who can punish.'

Said Farqad al-Sabakhl , 'The hypocrite looks on. When he sees no one, he embarks upon evil for he watches people, not God Exalted.'

Said 'Abd Allah b. Dinar, 'I left for Mecca with 'Umar b. al-Khattab and, on the way, we stopped for a rest. A shepherd came down to us from the mountain. He ['Umar]said to him, "O shepherd, sell me a sheep from your herd."

'The shepherd replied, "I belong to someone."

"Say to your master that it was devoured by a wolf."

"Where is God then?"

'Umar wept. Returning in the morning, he bought the shepherd from his master and freed him, saying, "With this word you are freed in this world. I hope it frees you in the Hereafter .'" 27

An Exposition of the Reality and Degrees of Vigilance

Know that the reality of vigilance is to be aware of the one watching (raqib) and to turn attention to him. Therefore, one who is cautious about a matter because of someone else is said to be vigilant of someone and watchful of his own flank. In other words, vigilance is a state of the heart that results from a kind of knowledge. This state causes the action in the heart and the limbs.

The 'state' is the heart's heedfulness of the one who watches and preoccupation with him; the heart turns to him, observes him and applies itself to him. As to the 'knowledge which gives rise to this state ', this is the knowledge that God sees the hearts, knows everyone's innermost secrets, watches the deeds of the servants and oversees in every soul what it has earned. For Him, the secret of the heart is exposed, much like the exposed face for people nay, more so.

When this knowledge becomes certain I mean devoid of doubt it overcomes and dominates the heart. Not all indubitable knowledge 29 prevails over the heart such as the knowledge of death. When [certain knowledge] subdues the heart, it makes it mindful in deference to the one who watches and it turns its attention to him.

Those who are certain in this knowledge are those who are near to God (muqarrabun). They comprise the perfectly truthful

(siddiqun) and the people of the right hand (ashah al-yamln). There fore, their vigilance is on two levels:

First level. The first level is the vigilance of the perfectly truthful among those near to God. This is the vigilance of glorification and exaltation. It is when the heart is engrossed in the awareness of this exaltation, crushed by awe; therefore, it has no room truly to consider another. We will not detain ourselves by describing the deeds of this vigilance, which is confined to the heart.

The members, for their part, are incapable of turning towards the lawful and away from the prohibited [on their own]. When they move [during the performance of] pious deeds they are like everything used for that purpose. They do not direct or confirm [themselves] in their set course. Rather, the flock is fully set [on its path] by the dominion of the shepherd. The heart is the shepherd. When [the heart] becomes absorbed in the One worshipped, the members [in turn] are employed without hindrance according to a fixed and straight course.

This is the person with a single focus, for God has spared him other foci. A Someone who attains to this level so disregards creation that he neither sees another's presence, even with his eyes wide-open, nor hears what he is told, even though he is not deaf to it. For example, he may pass by his son without speaking to him; and as when a person says to his detractor, 'When you [next] encounter me, stir me.' B

Do not think this farfetched. You will find its analogy in those hearts that exalt earthly kings, that are subservient to the kings and hardly sensing what overtakes them in the presence of kings because they are so absorbed by them. For the heart can become preoccupied with a trivial thing of the world, and the man while walking can become immersed in thinking about it and may walk on past the place he was headed for and forget the concern that motivated him [in the first place].

Ahd al-Wahid b. Zayd was asked , 'In this age, do you know of a man who, self-absorbed, is oblivious of people?'

'I only know of one man who will momentarily come to you.' And just as quickly entered 'Utba [b. Aban b.] al-Ghulam . Ahd al-Wahid asked him, 'Where have you come from, O 'Utba?' He replied from such-and-such a place. He was on his way to the market.

'Whom did you meet on the way?'

'I saw no one .' 3

It is related that Yahya b. Zakariyya A (peace be upon them both) once met a woman. He pushed her and she fell over. Asked why he acted thus, he said, 'I thought she was only a wall .' 3

It is narrated someone once said 34 that he encountered a group of people shooting [arrows]. One person sat far from them. I approached him, wanting to speak with him. But he said, 'The remembrance of God is more desirable.'

'You are alone,' I said.

'My Lord and my two angels are with me,' he said.

'Which of these [people present] will win out?' I asked.

'The one whom God forgives.'

'Where is the path,' I asked. He pointed towards heaven, rose and walked away, saying, 'Most of Your creatures are distracted from You .'

These are the words of someone absorbed in the vision of God, speaking only from God and hearing only through Him. Such a person need not watch his tongue and limbs, for they move only through what he is in.

[Abu Bakr] Shibli entered upon Abu al-Husayn al-Nuri, who was in retreat. He found him tranquil and good company. Nothing about him seemed to move. He asked him, 'How did you acquire such vigilance and repose?'

'From a cat we used to own. Whenever it wanted to hunt, it stood poised upon a rock without a hair moving.'
Said Abu Abd Allah b. Khafifa, 'I departed from Egypt towards Ramalah A in order to meet Abu All al-Rudhbarl. 'Isa b. Yunus al-Misrl, known as the Ascetic, told me that in Tyre B a youth and an adult shared the same state of vigilance. "If you but looked at them, you would benefit from them."

'I arrived in Tyre famished and thirsty, with only a rag around my waist and nothing on my shoulders. I entered the mosque and there sat two men facing the qibla. 'I greeted them, but they did not answer. I greeted them a second and third time . Still I heard no response.

““I implore you, by God, to return my salutation,” I said.
Then the youth raised his head from beneath his patched gown (; marqaatihi) 37 and looked at me, saying, “O Ibn Khafif, the world is paltry and nothing but the paltry remains of the paltry. So, take the great from the paltry. Ibn Khafif, the smaller your preoccupation,

the freer you are for our meeting [with God].” He captivated me.

‘Then he tilted his head in [another] direction. I remained with them for the noon and afternoon prayers, as my hunger, thirst and pains had gone away. In the afternoon I said, “Admonish me!” The youth raised his head to me and said, “O Ibn Khafif, we are companions in misfortune, we have no words of admonition.” I stayed with them for three days, neither eating nor drinking nor sleeping. I saw neither food nor drink with them.

‘On the third day, I said to myself that I shall entreat them to preach to me that I may benefit from their admonition. Then the youth raised his head and told me, “O Ibn Khafif, you must befriend the one who reminds you of God when you see him. May his dread befall your heart and may he admonish you in the language of his deed, not that of his words. And so farewell, leave us.”’

This then is the level of the vigilant whose hearts are dominated by exaltation and glorification. They have no capacity for anything else.

Second level. The second level is the vigilance of the pious (wari 'un) among the people of the right hand. This group is that of those whose hearts are overcome by the certainty that God sees the hearts’ interiors and exteriors. However , the awareness of divine majesty does not dazzle them. On the contrary, their hearts keep within the limit of balance and are capable of attending to states and deeds. While performing deeds, however, they never fail to be vigilant. They are certainly dominated by shame (haya) before God, advancing and retreating only upon confirmation in it. They abstain from what might disgrace them on [the Day of] Resurrection. But since they [already] consider that God sees them in the world, they have no need to await the Resurrection.

You will recognise the difference between the two levels from the gazes [of onlookers] (mushahadat). You may be performing certain acts by yourself, but then a youth or a woman comes over who, you learn, has seen you and you are embarrassed. You sit in a more becoming manner, alert not to reverence and exaltation but to shame. Although it neither amazed nor engrossed you, [the boy’s or woman’s] sight did arouse shame in you. Then some king or eminent person walks in. You take to exaltation, abandoning everything else 39 that occupied you; without embarrassment because of him. This is how the levels of worshippers differ in the vigilance of God Exalted.

He who is at this [second] level needs to be vigilant about everything he does and does not do, his thoughts and glances in short, his every choice. He is responsible for them in two respects:

before the act and during the act. Before the act, he should observe what appears to him and what actually gives rise to his thought. Is it for God, in particular? Or does the passion of the soul or adherence to the devil give rise to it? This should cause him to pause and settle it, until it is revealed to him through the light of God.

If it is for God, he may complete it. If it is for something other than God, he feels shame before Him and desists, his soul pained by his wish, attention and inclination. He recognises the evil of his soul's commission, the scandal of its pursuit, and that it is its own foe unless God restores it through His protection.

Above all, this pause is a duty which must be imposed and which no one can escape . As the report says, 'The servant [of God] knows that his every activity, however small, contains three accountings (dawawin). The first is 'why'; the second 'how' and the third 'for whom '.' 1 The 'why' implies 'why have you done this'? Were you obliged to do it for your Master or have your desire and passion caused you to be so inclined?

If the person is released from this, being obliged to act thus because of his Master, he is asked the second accountings: 'How did you do this?' For every deed has a condition and judgement by God; its measure, time and quality are discernible only through knowledge. Therefore, the person is asked: 'How did you act with verified knowledge or through ignorance and supposition?'

If he is released from this, the third accountings is brought forward the questioning about sincerity. He will be asked: 'For whom have you acted? Was it purely for God's countenance to fulfil your utterance of "There is no deity but God", for which God must reward you? Or, to dissimulate a mortal like yourself, [in which case] take your recompense from him. Or, for immediate, mundane reasons; in which case your claim will be redeemed in this world alone. Or inadvertently, in which case you will not be rewarded, and your deed and effort will have been futile.' 'If it was done for anyone but Me, then you shall earn loathing and wrath, for you are My servant. You eat what I provide, luxuriate in what comfort I give and then you act for another's sake. Yet, you heard Me say, Verily, those whom ye call upon besides God as servants are servants like you ; 43 The things ye worship besides God have no provisions to give thee; seek then sustenance from God, worship Him and be grateful to Him . Woe to you! Have you not heard Me say, Is it to God that sincere devotion is done ?' S

When the servant of God knows that faced with these demands and reproaches, he will call his soul to account before it is called to account. And he will prepare an answer to the question, and ensure that the answer is correct . He will [no longer] advance or retreat without verification; he will not move

an eyelid or a fingertip without forethought.

Said the Prophet to Mu 'adh [b. Jabal], '[Each] man will be asked about the kohl around his eyes, and the tads 47 of earth on his two fingers and his touching of his brother's garb . '

Said Hasan [al-Basri], 'When one of them wanted to give alms he reflected and gave careful consideration. If it was for God, he performed it .' 9 He said, 'God is merciful towards a servant who, arrested by a concern of his, pursues it if it is for God, but holds back when it is for something else . '

In a tradition, Sa 'd [b. Abi Waqqas] said that Salman [al-Farisi] had advised him, 'Fear God, in [all] your concerns, if you have any.'

Said Muhammad b. Ali, 'He is faithful who is an unhurried overseer facing his care he is not like a wood gatherer at night . '

This, then, is the first consideration of vigilance. Nothing rescues from this but firm knowledge and a true understanding of the secrets of actions, the depths of the soul and the subterfuges of the devil. He who knows not himself, his Lord or his foe, Iblls, and neither knows what accords with his passion nor distinguishes it from what God loves , but accepts it in his intention, care, thought, rest and activity will not find protection in this [kind of] vigilance. Indeed, most people will exhibit ignorance in what God dislikes, believing they are fashioning improvements ,

Do not think that the person ignorant of what is capable of being learned may be excused. Far from it! Seeking knowledge is obligatory for all Muslims. This is why two prayer cycles (rak a) by a knowledgeable person are better than a thousand by an ignorant one. This is because the former knows about the evils of the soul, the subterfuges of the devil and loci of illusion consequently, he guards against them. The ignoramus, on the other hand, does not know all of this, so how could he be wary of it? He is always in hardship. The devil is pleased with him and takes malicious joy. We seek God's protection from the ignoramus and from ignorance and negligence, for this is the root of distress, the basis of loss.

God has ruled that every servant must be vigilant with his soul when contemplating an act and undertaking to use one of his members. Let him pause at the contemplation and at the undertaking until the light of knowledge reveals to him either that the act would be for God and that he should complete it; or that it would be due to the soul's passion and that he should guard against it, and keep the heart from pondering and concentrating on it.

If the first false notion is not repelled, it may give rise to a

desire and the desire to a contemplation, the contemplation to a firm resolve, the resolve to a deed and the deed to ruin and odium. One ought to cut the substance of evil at its source of origin, namely, the notion (khatir), for everything follows behind it.

Whenever the matter seems obscure for God's servant or the situation appears murky and inexplicable, let him ponder it in the light of knowledge. Let him seek refuge in God from the subterfuge the devil spins by means of the [servant's] passion. But if he is able neither of striving nor meditating on his own, let him find enlightenment through religious scholars, but let him take flight from the misguided scholars devoted to this world flight from the devil. More emphatically, God revealed to David (peace be upon him), 'Ask no scholar about Me who is inebriated with love of this world. He will sever you from My affection. These are the ones who cut off the path for My servants. Therefore, the hearts that are obscured by the love of this world, that frenzy over it and greatly covet it are veiled from the light of God. The illumination of the lights of the hearts is the presence of lordship. How then can anyone be illuminated by them who turns his back on them, accepts their enemy, hates them passionately and finds them repugnant? Those are but the desires of this world.

Let the seeker (murid) focus primarily on the judgements of knowledge or on his search for a scholar who is averse to this world or whose desire for it is weak if not for one who harbours no desire for it at all. God's Messenger (may God bless him and grant him peace) said, 'God loves the critical gaze upon doubtful matters and the accomplished intellect at the onslaught of desires' ³ combining two things, which in [their] reality are inseparable. He whose intellect cannot restrain the desires does not possess the [requisite] critical view of doubtful matters. This is why God's Messenger stated, 'He that yields to a sin: his intellect shall depart from him never to return to him again .' For, no matter what the weak intellect with which the human being is furnished determines, he will embark on its obliteration and annihilation through the temptation of sin.

In these times, knowledge about the evils of deeds has been extinguished. People have abandoned these sciences ; ⁵⁵ they busy themselves with mediating differences among the population that are stirred up by the adherence to desires, claiming this is the true jurisprudence (Jiqh). They separate that science namely, the jurisprudence of religion (Jiqh al-din) from other sciences and devote themselves solely to the jurisprudence of the world (fiqh al-dunya), which is intended only to ward off the worries of the hearts and to pave the way for jurisprudence of religion. Yet, the jurisprudence of the world is part of religion (din) [only] by way of jurisprudence . According to the report, 'Today you are at a

time when the best among you is he who forges ahead (musari).
A time will come when the best among you will be the cautious
(mutathabbit).’

This is why a group of the Prophet’s Companions took pause
regarding the fight with the Iraqi and Syrian [soldiery allied
with Muawiya], as the matter was unclear for them [among
whom were Companions] like Sa 'd b. Abi Waqqas, Abd Allah b.
c Umar, Usama and Muhammad b. Maslama and others.

Someone who does not pause (tawaqqaf) when in doubt
follows his passions, proud of his opinion. He is like those
whom the Messenger of God described when he said, ‘If you
see submission to avarice, adherence to passion, and admiration
of each his own opinion, you must be responsible for your own
self .’ 6 Anyone who proceeds with a doubtful matter without
verification contradicts what God said, Pursue not that which
thou knowest not . The Prophet said, ‘Beware of conjecture, for
conjecture is the most deceptive thing uttered .’ 8 He meant by
this conjecturing without any evidence for example, any from
the common run who consults his heart over an unclear matter
and follows his conjectures.

It was against the difficulty and magnitude of this that [Abu
Bakr] al-Siddiq had prayed, ‘O God, show me the real truth and
endow me with adherence to it; show me what is truly false and
endow me with its avoidance. Make it not so obscure for me that
I follow passion.’

Said Jesus (peace be upon him), ‘There are three [kinds] of
things: one the rectitude of which is clear, so adhere to it; an
other the error of which is clear, so avoid it; and [a third] which
is obscure to you, so leave it to he who understands it.’

One of the Prophet’s prayers was, ‘O God, I seek refuge in
Thee against making utterance in religion without knowledge .’

For the greatest of God’s blessings upon His servants is
knowledge and truth unveiled. Faith is a kind of unveiling and
knowledge. This is why God graciously said to his servant, Great
is God’s favour upon thee. ° by which He meant knowledge. God
said, Ask those who recall [God’s message], if ye have not the knowledge ;
61 Verily, it is for Us to guide ; 62 Nay, it is for Us to make clear ; 63 It
is for God \to show] the right way 64

Said 'All [Ibn Abi Talib], ‘Passion is the accomplice of blind
ness. Success entails pausing upon hesitation. Yea, nothing banishes
care better than certainty and remorse better than effacing
the lie. In truthfulness is the salvation. Someone at a distance
may be closer than one close by; and it is unusual for one not to

have an intimate. The perfectly truthful is he whose inner state (ghaybuhu) is truthful. Do not let a suspicion keep you from a beloved. Yea, the best character trait is generosity and from modesty (haya') springs everything comely. Piety (taqwa) is the most secure bond. The firmest relation you can assume is between you and God. You have gained from this world what you have tilled for your abode [in the Hereafter].

'Sustenance is [of two kinds]: one which you seek and one that seeks you. A If you do not come to it, it will come to you. If you regret what has slipped from you, regret not then what has not occurred. Inquire about what has not happened through what has.

'Things resemble each other. Man rejoices over attaining what would not have missed him and sorrows over losing what he would never have attained . Do not exult over what is given to you in your world. And be not regretful for what you miss of it. Your joy should be in what lies before you, your regret in what is behind you. Your preoccupation should be with your Afterlife, and your care with what lies after death.' Our reason for transmitting these words is 'All's statement 'Success entails pausing upon hesitation.'

Accordingly, the first consideration* for the vigilant person is to look into the matter of concern or the activity: Is it for God or for passion? Said the Prophet (may God bless him and grant him peace), 'A person who perfects his faith has three [traits]: in God he fears no detractor; he boasts about none of his deeds; and faced with two choice one for the world, the other for the Hereafter he prefers the Hereafter to the world .' 5 What is disclosed to him about his deeds is, at most, that they are permissible. Unconcerned, he abandons them, because of what the Prophet had said, 'What is comely about a man's Islam is that he forsakes what concerns him not.'

The second consideration is that of vigilance upon the initiation of action namely, checking how the action [is executed] in compliance with the prerogative of God in the matter, improving the intention in order to complete and perfect the action, and pursuing it as far as possible. These are imperative for him in all his states. For in every state, he is always either active or at rest. If he is wary of God in all of these, he will be well capable of acts of worship before God with intention, good deed and deference to propriety.

When a person is seated, for instance, he ought to sit facing the qibla. As the Prophet (may God bless him and grant him peace) said, 'The best sitting is where one faces the qibla .' 6 He should not sit cross-legged, as one does not sit like that with kings for the King of kings sees him .

Said Ibrahim b. Adham, 'Once I sat cross-legged when I heard a voice calling out: Is this the way to sit with kings? After that I never again sat down cross-legged.'

When a person sleeps he ought to sleep on his right hand side facing the qibla. [This and the above are] among the manners (adab) we have mentioned elsewhere in their proper contexts. All pertain to vigilance. Even relieving oneself has to be according to propriety and should be in keeping with vigilance.

Therefore, the servant of God may act out of obedience, disobedience or permissibility. He is vigilant in acts of obedience through sincerity, completion, deference to propriety and the guarding against evil-doing. Upon acts of disobedience he is vigilant through repentance, remorse, abstention, shame and the use of introspection. With permissible acts he is vigilant through deference to propriety and, finally, by bearing witness to the Benefactor for a blessing and being grateful for it.

In no state is God's servant without a hardship he must for bear, nor a blessing for which he must be grateful. All this is part of vigilance. The servant can never release himself from his duty towards God in any state. This may consist of an act which he has to pursue, something forbidden he must forgo, or an assignment spurring him on quickly towards God's pardon, ahead of God's [other] servants. Or it may be something permissible and salutary for his body and heart, assisting him in his pious deeds. Each one of these has limits, the observance of which perpetuate the vigilance. And any that transgresses the limits of God wrongs only himself.

In these three classes [of acts], God's servant must be introspective at every moment. If he is free of obligatory duties (fara'id) and capable of supererogatory ones (fada'il), he must search for the best action and set himself to it. Someone who fails to take the highest profit, when he can, has duped [himself]. Profits are gained by supererogatory acts. Thus the servant takes from his world for his afterlife. As God says, Nor forget thy portion in this world.

This can all be secured in a single moment. There are three [kinds of] moments: the moment passed, with no [further] exertion for the servant, whether it ended in toil or comfort; the future moment unreckoned, which the servant does not know whether or not he will live to see and does not perceive what God has decreed for it; finally, the present moment during which he must exert himself and be wary of his Lord.

If the second [kind of] moment does not come to pass for him, he will not grieve its loss. But if it comes to pass, then he may claim his right from it just as he would the first [kind of moment].

He should not carry his hope fifty years forward, for then the resoluteness [required for] vigilance might weary him. Indeed, he should be 'the son of the moment' (ibn al-waqt, A somewhat like being at his last few breaths. He may well be at his last few breaths without knowing it.

If it is possible that he is at his last breaths, then he must be in a state in which he is not averse to being overtaken by death . All his states must be limited to what Abu Dharr (may God be pleased with him) narrated about the Prophet's utterance, 'The believer journeys for [one of] three things: provisions for the final] destination, improved livelihood or pleasure in something not forbidden .' 2 And in this vein, 'It is incumbent upon the sound of mind to have four moments: a moment where he confides (yunaji) in his Lord; a moment to take his soul to account; a moment to ponder what God has made; and a moment devoted to eating and drinking the latter moment as an aid for the other moments .' 3 The moment when the servant's members are occupied with eating and drinking should not be devoid of a deed which is the best of deeds namely, remembrance and thought. The food he consumes, for example, contains marvels which, if he contemplates and comprehends them, are superior to most of what the members do.

People differ over this. One group view [food] reflectively (bi- 'ayn al-tabassur): 74 they gaze at the marvels of its [the food's] creation; how animal sustenance is connected with it; how God deemed it a means of subsistence; the creation of the desires 75 that drive towards it; the instruments adapted to making it desirable.

We have explained some of this in the Book of Thankfulness . A This is the station of the 'people of insight' (dhawi al-alhah).

Another group view [food] with loathing and aversion; taking it as a necessity and wishing they were free of it. However, they see that they are subjugated to it and subdued by the desire for it. This is the station of the ascetics (zahidiin).

Yet another group 76 see in the work the Maker, and rise above it towards the attributes of the Creator. This experience brings forth [new] avenues of thinking 77 to be contemplated, avenues which open because of that. This is the highest station, the station of the gnostics ('arifun) and the signs of the amorous (muhibiin). For when the one who loves sees his beloved's work, letter and writing he forgets the work [itself] and his heart becomes engrossed in the maker [of the work].

Everything that recurs to the servant 78 is God's making. When he turns from it to look at the Maker his purview is wide; assuming the doors of the heavenly kingdom (malakiit) open for him,

and this is very rare indeed.

The fourth group view [food] as desire and longing (hirs). They regret missing out on it and rejoice when they partake of it. They find fault with whatever does not agree with their passion and blame the one who made it, and so they find fault with both the cooking and the cook. They do not know that the agent behind the cooking, the cook and his power and knowledge is God Himself. He who finds fault in God's creation without God's leave blames God. This is why the Prophet (may God bless him and grant him peace) said, 'Do not curse time (dahr), for time is God .' 9

This then is the Second Steadfast Commitment, that of the continual and uninterrupted vigilance of deeds. It would be too lengthy to expand [further] on it. The above merely shows the way for whoever can master the principles.

CHAPTER THREE

The Third Steadfast Commitment:
Self-examination After the Act, Recalling
the Merit of Examination and Its Reality

W E SHALL DISCUSS the merit of self-examination followed by its reality.

The Merit of Self-examination

Regarding the merit [of self-examination], God says, O ye faithful, fear God and let the soul look to what [provision] it has sent for the morrow . This signifies the examination of past acts.

It is why 'Umar said about this, 'Examine yourselves before you are examined. Weigh before you are weighed.'

According to a tradition, a man came to the Prophet (may God bless him and grant him peace) saying, 'O Messenger of God, give me advice.'

'You seek advice?' replied the Messenger.

'Yea,' the man said.

'When you embark upon something, determine its consequences. If it is right, complete it if wrong, refrain from it .'

According to a report, the sound of mind must have four moments, one of which is to examine himself .

God says, Repent to God, ye all, O faithful, that you may attain to happiness . Repentance is a consideration of the deed after one is freed from it through remorse.

Said the Prophet (may God bless him and grant him peace), 'I seek God's forgiveness and repent to Him a hundred times a day .'

Said God, When those who fear God are taken hy a sudden urge from Satan they remember [God], and immediately they can see [aright] .

It is said that 'Umar used to strike his feet at nightfall with a lash of whip, saying, 'What have I done today?'

It is told that Maymun b. Mahran said, 'The servant [of God] is not godfearing until he calls himself more strictly to account than he would his associate,' for associates settle their accounts after the act.

It is said that 'A'isha was told by Abu Bakr as he was dying, 'No one is dearer to me than 'Umar.' Then he said to her, 'What did I say?' She repeated his words. And he said, 'No one is more beloved to me than 'Umar.' Notice his remark after finishing the [first] utterance: he measured it and substituted another utterance in its place.

In a tradition, Abu Talha tells of the time when a bird distracted him from his prayer; weighing this, he offered his walled enclosure as an offering to God in remorse, hoping that this might compensate for what he had missed .

It is reported that ['Abd Allah] Ibn Salam was carrying a bundle of firewood when someone said to him, 'O Abu Yusuf, any of your children or servants could have spared you this.' He said, 'I wanted to see if my soul would object to it.'

Said al-Hasan [al-Basri], 'The faithful one manages his soul and calls it to account for the sake of God. The Reckoning is lighter for a people who examine themselves in this world, but it will be harsher on the Day of Resurrection for those people who deal with this matter without self-examination.' He then explained self-examination, 'The person of faith is confronted by the thing that pleases him and says, "By God, you please me and I am in need of you . But far from it! You are prohibited to me."' This is self-examination before the act. He then said, 'And he forgoes the thing and returns to his soul.' He then said, 'What did I intend by this? "By God, I cannot vouch for it. And, by God, I shall never repeat this, God willing!"'*

Said Anas b. Malik, 'I was listening to 'Umar b. al-Khattab one day. He went out and I went with him until he passed into an enclosure. I heard him say when he was in the enclosure, and between him and me was the wall, " 'Umar b. al-Khattab, Commander of the Faithful well done! Verily you will fear God or verily He will punish you!'"

About God's words, And nay I swear by the self-reproaching soul, al-Hasan [al-Basri] said, 'You will always find the believer reproaching himself: What did I mean by what I said? What was the reason for this food I ate? What was the reason for this drink I drank? The sinful one moves forward without any self-reproach.'

Said Malik b. Dinar, 'God was merciful with a servant who said to his soul, "Have you not befriended so-and-so? Have you not befriended?" He then bridled [his soul], placed a halter on it and enjoined upon it the Book of God, which then led him.' This then is self-reproach as will later be discussed.

Said Maymun b. Mahran, 'The pious person examines his soul more severely than if he were a tyrannical ruler and a niggardly associate.'

Said Ibrahim al-Tayml, 'I imagined myself in paradise eating of its fruits, drinking from its streams and embracing its maidens. Then I imagined myself in the Fire, eating from its infernal tree, drinking its purulence and attending to its chains and shackles. So I said to my soul, "O soul, which do you want?" She said, 'I want to return to the world to do what is right.' I said, "You shall have your desire, so go forth.'" 12

Said Malik b. Dinar, 'I heard al-Hajjaj [b. Yusuf al-Thaqafi] preaching [from the pulpit], "God is merciful with a man who calls his soul to account before [the account] with another. God is merciful with a man who reins in his deed and considers what he intends by it. God is merciful 13 with a man who considers that by which he will be measured. God is merciful 14 with a man who considers his weight [on the Balance]." [Al-Hajjaj] continued to speak thus until he made me weep.' 5

A companion of al-Ahnaf b. Qays [al-Tamlml] said, 'I used to accompany him. His nightly prayer was mostly supplication. He used to approach the lamp and place his finger in it until he felt the flame. Then he would say to himself, "O true believer, what made you do what you did on such-and-such a day? What made you do what you did on such-and-such a day?"'

An Exposition of the Reality of Self-examination After the Act

Know that just as the servant of God has from the beginning of the day to obtain his soul's agreement with truthful admonition, so by day's end he has a time within which to demand an accounting and to examine his soul for all it has or has not done.

In their mundane concerns, the merchants of this world act in similar fashion with their associates at the end of every year, month or day. They are fearful of omitting anything of the world that might be a boon to them. If that were to happen to them, they would have only a few days left [to rectify the balance]. So how can a reasonable man fail to examine his soul about what relates to the danger of eternal damnation or salvation? Surely such indulgence is due to forgetfulness (ghafla), failure, and success denied (qillat al-taufiq) [by God], From this we seek refuge in God.

The examination of an associate implies consideration of the capital, the profit and the loss in order to distinguish the surplus from the loss. If there is a gain in revenue, it is received in full and gratefully. In the event of a loss, it is claimed as a liability and as signed as a future indemnity.

The same holds true for the capital of the worshipper with respect to his debt in obligations, his profit in supererogatory acts and virtues his loss is disobedience. The suitable time for this commerce is the whole day. The treatment of his 'commanding soul' (al-nafs al-ammara) must be severe* He must first settle his account with it regarding the obligatory acts (fara'id). If he has performed them properly he thanks God for it and increases its desirability for the soul. If he did not perform [the obligatory acts] at all, then he obliges [the soul] to make up for them. If he had performed them incompletely, then he forces upon it the charge of supererogatory duties. Now, in the case of a commission of sin, he concentrates on [the soul's] punishment, torment and censure, that it may fully rectify the excess as the merchant does with his associate.

Just as he scrutinizes the mundane accounting of every measure and weight, so he records entries for gains and losses in order to preclude cheating. Thus, he must guard against the deceit and cunning of the soul. For it is deceptive, dubious and cunning. Therefore, let him first ask [the soul] to rectify the response to everything uttered in the course of his day; and let him make his soul liable for what account another will own at the high plateau of the Resurrection.

And the same holds with respect to what he has seen; indeed

his notions, ideas, thoughts, standing, sitting, eating, drinking and sleeping even his silence. For what reason was he silent, and why was he at rest?.

If he knows all of the soul's obligations and proves his worth, performing his duty therewith, this worth is counted as his.

A The Qur'an refers to the soul in different ways; al-nafs al-ammara hi'l-su appears in verse xn.53. In discussions of the soul, al-nafs al-ammara bi'l-sii' is very often contrasted to two higher states of soul: al-nafs al-mutma'inna and al-nafs al-radiya.

Therefore, the remainder of what is incumbent on him becomes manifest to him. Let him consolidate this in his soul and write it on the parchment of his heart, just as he wrote the remainder [of the commerce] owed by his associate, in both his memory and ledger.

The soul is a debtor whose debts must be paid in full, some of them in reparation and security; some in restitution in kind; and some by punishment. None of this is possible save after the account has been confirmed and what remains is determined truthfully in the obligatory manner. Upon that, one may turn to calling to account and demanding payment. Then, one must call the soul to account for every day and hour, through an entire lifetime and with respect to every organ, both exterior and interior as narrated about Tawba b. Summa, who lived in Riqqah. A He used to take his soul to account. One day he counted his age. When he found he was sixty years old, he counted the days. When [he found] them to be one thousand five hundred and twenty-one days, he shouted, 'Woe to me, I shall meet the angel with a thousand five hundred and twenty-one days' misdeeds. And every day ten thousand misdeeds there are!' Then he dropped on the spot and died. A voice was heard saying, 'With what speed to the highest paradise.'

This is how every hour one must examine one's own soul for every breath and every disobedience 20 of the heart or the members. If the servant were to throw a stone into his house for every act of disobedience, he would fill his house within a short period of his life. But he is careless with his record of sins although the two angels record [all] this for him. God has reckoned it, though it he forgotten.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Fourth Steadfast Commitment:

Punishing the Soul for Its Dereliction

HOWEVER MUCH GOD'S SERVANT examines his soul, it will be free neither of the temptation to sin nor of being remiss in respect of God's right. Therefore, he must not neglect [his soul]. Neglecting it facilitates his temptation to sin, to which his soul may grow accustomed and then find it difficult to shed it. This is what causes the ruin of the soul. In deed, he must punish it.

Should the servant eat a morsel on account of the soul's dubious appetite, he must punish the stomach with hunger. If he looks at a female who is not of marriageable [status], he must 2 amerce the eye by forbidding the gaze. This is how he may punish every part of his body by denying himself his desires. This is the custom of those who take the way of the Hereafter.

Mansur b. Ibrahim relates that a worshipper speaking to a woman kept placing his hand on her thigh then became remorseful, so he put his hand over the fire until it was desiccated.

It is related that a man among the Children of Israel used to worship at his hermitage. He did this for a long time. One particular day, while looking out, he saw a woman. Charmed and captivated by her, he stepped his foot forward to approach her, but God reminded him of a previous offence and he muttered, 'What is this that I wish to do?' Regaining himself and restrained by God, he felt remorseful. When he wanted to place his foot back into the hermitage, he said, 'How wrong, how wrong! Can a foot that moved forward intending to disobey God return with me to my hermitage? By God, never shall this come to pass!' He left his foot outside 4 the hermitage, scourged by rain, wind, ice, sun until it was severed and fell off. God commended him for this and mentioned him in one of His books.

Junayd related that he heard Ibn al-Kartani 5 say, 'I found my self impure one night and had to 6 perform the ritual wash. But the night was cold and I found myself tardy and slack. My soul murmured laxity to me until the morning when I can heat the water, or enter the bath and not weary myself. 1 said, "How strange! I deal with God all my life, bound by His right over me; 8 yet I feel no haste inside me, only pause and slackness." I resolved to wash only with this patched garment on me. I resolved that I shall never remove, wring and dry it in the sun.

It is told that when Ghazwan and Abu Musa [al-Ash 'arl] went on one of their military expeditions, a servant-girl was discovered. Ghazwan I looked at her, then lifted his hand and struck his eye until it jutted out. He said, 'Because of the eye you were in harm's way.'

A man cast but one look at a woman and vowed never to drink cool water for the rest of his life. He drank lukewarm water to make life joyless.

It is told that Hassan b. Abi Sunan, passing by a dwelling, muttering, 'When was this built?' He addressed his soul, 'You ask about what concerns you not. I shall punish you with a year of fasting.' And he forced it to fast."

Said Malik b. Daygham, 'Ribah al-Qays! came asking about my father after the afternoon prayer. We told him he was asleep. He said, "Sleep at this hour? 11 This is a time for sleep? Then I must leave." So we dispatched a messenger after him to tell him, "Should we wake him for you?"

'The messenger returned and said, "He was too occupied to understand anything from me. I reached him as he entered the cemetery, reproving 12 himself, 'Did you really say, is this hour a time for sleep? Is it up to you? Let the man sleep as he likes. What caused you to think that this was not an hour for sleep? You speak about what you know not. Verily, to God I make a vow which I shall never break that you will never lie on the ground to sleep except for a crippling illness or a swoon. Shame on you. Have you no shame? How you have been rebuked! There is no end to your transgression.' [The messenger] said, "The man began to weep without noticing my presence. When I saw this I left him alone.'" 13

It is related that 14 Tamim al-Darl slept one night without rising for the night vigil. So he spent a whole year without sleep as punishment for what happened.

Talha related that a man rushed off, removed his clothes and tossed himself in the hot sand, saying to himself, 'Taste, for Hell is even hotter. Are you cadaverous at night, sinful by day?' While doing this, he suddenly saw the Prophet (may God bless him and grant him peace) in the shade of a tree. He went to him and said, 'My soul has overpowered me.'

The Prophet asked him, 'Was it necessary to do what you did? The gates of Heaven shall be opened for you and God shall take pride in you with the angels.' The Prophet then said to his Companions, 'Learn from your brother.'

[Each of the Companions] took to saying, 'O so-and-so, pray for me.' 5 The Prophet said, 'Include them!'

'O Lord, make piety their provision, make righteous their affairs,' said the man.

The Prophet then said ‘Lord, guide him [to the best prayer]...’ and the man said, ‘Lord, make paradise their place of return.’⁶

Said Hudhayfa b. Qatada, ‘A man was asked, “What do you do with your soul’s desires?” “No soul on the face of the earth is more loathsome to me,” he said. “How can I then give it its desires?”’⁷

Ibn al-Sammak entered upon Da’ud al-Ta’l after the latter had died and while [his body] was still on the ground in his house. He said, ‘O Da’ud, you imprisoned your soul before it became imprisoned. You tormented it before it became tormented. And today you shall see the reward of the One for whom you acted.’⁸

Wahb b. Munabbih [al-Yamanl] related that a man prayed for a [long] time. Then a need arose in him for something from God. So he fasted every Saturday for seventy Saturdays, eating eleven dates [only] in each. Then he asked for what he needed 19 but he was not granted it. He returned to his soul, saying, ‘I will do away with you. If you had some good in you, you would have been granted your desire.’ An angel descended upon him and said, ‘O son of Adam, this hour of yours [reproaching your soul] is better than your past worship. God hath granted your desire.’⁹

Said Abd Allah b. Qays, A ‘We were on a military expedition when the enemy appeared. The alert was made and everyone stood in rank; it was a very windy day. A man in front of me addressed himself, “O my soul, was I not at such-and-such a battle and you said to me, ‘What of your family and children?’ and I obeyed you and retreated? Was I not at such-and-such a battle and you said to me, ‘What of your family and children?’ and I obeyed you and retreated? By God, I shall present thee before God today, either He will take you or He will let you live.”

‘I said I would watch him that day, and I watched him. When the mass [of soldiers] attacked their enemy, he was in the fore front. Then the enemy attacked, and the soldiers were exposed. He remained where he was until they were exposed several times, standing his ground and fighting. By God, he continued in this and persevered until I saw him thrown to the ground. I counted in him and his mount sixty or more gashes.’

We have already mentioned the tradition [transmitted] about Abu Talha when he was distracted from his prayer by a bird in his walled enclosure; ²¹ in penance he divested himself of the walled enclosure as alms. And that 'Umar used to strike his feet with a scourge every night and say, ‘What have you wrought today?’

Mujamma 'related that once he lifted his head to a roof terrace and his eyes fell upon a woman. He vowed never to lift his head towards the sky as long as he lived in this world.

At night, al-Ahnaf b. Qays [al-Tamimi] ever had a lantern beside him. He used to place his finger over it and say to himself, 'What compelled you to do this on such-and-such a day?'

Wahib b. al-Ward denied himself something* and plucked out the hairs of his chest until the pain was great. Then he took to telling himself, 'I want only the best for you.' 2

Muhammad b. Bishr once saw Da'ud al-Ta'i eating unsalted bread for breakfast. He said to him, 'What if you ate it with salt?'

[Da'ud] replied, 'My soul has been urging me for a year [to eat] salt,' but Da'ud tasted no more salt as long as he lived in this world.

This, then, is how those who possess resolve (ullal- 'azm) punish themselves. What is remarkable is that you should punish your servant, community, household and child for what they do out of character and for being remiss in something; you fear that if you let them off, they would not obey your choice and would turn on you. And yet, you neglect your soul, your worst enemy and worst oppressor. The harm from its oppression is greater than the harm of your household, since their goal is merely to disturb your life in this world.

If you are discerning, you would know that living is living for the Hereafter, where the abiding comfort has no end. Your soul is what spoils the life of the Hereafter. It is the first to be punished before anything else.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Fifth Steadfast Commitment: Renewed Striving

THE FACT IS THAT WHEN A PERSON examines his soul, he finds it tempted by sin. Therefore, he must punish it in the manners described above. If he finds it sapless to the point of sloth with respect to anything to do with virtue and private devotion (awrad), he must discipline it by taxing it with [more] devotions and a variety of tasks, both on account of its omission and to compensate for what it has already been remiss in. This is how those who labour for God behave.

Having missed the public afternoon prayer, 'Umar b. al-Khattab (may God be pleased with him) punished himself by giving in alms land that belonged to him worth a hundred thousand dirhams.

Whenever Ibn 'Umar missed a public prayer he spent the same night in prayer. One night, he delayed the sunset prayer until two stars appeared [in the night sky] . A For this he manumitted two slaves.

When [al-Harth b. 'Abd Allah] Ibn Abl Rabi'a missed the two rak 'as of the morning prayer, he manumitted a slave.

Another man used to impose a year's fasting on himself, go on the pilgrimage on foot or give away all his money in alms. All this comprises the steadfast commitment (murabata) and censure of the soul for its own salvation.

You may argue: If my soul does not comply with me regarding renewed striving (mujahada) and assiduity in private devotions, how should it be treated?

I say: The way is to let the soul hear what the reports say about those who strove [in the way of God] (mujtahidun). The most useful treatment is to associate with one of God's servants who is striving in worship, to heed his words and to emulate him. As one man used to say, 'When languor in worship disgraces me, I observe the case of Muhammad b. Wasi 'and his striving and act thus for a week.' However, this treatment is impracticable, since nowadays no one is as striving in worship as were the ancients. Therefore, one must turn from observing to hearing (same?). And nothing is more useful than hearing about them and perusing their reports. Those who have given their utmost (al-juhd al-jahid), whose toil has come to an end and whose reward and ease shall last forever without interruption what greater dominion is there than theirs? There can be no greater regret than that of he who does not emulate them, gratifying his soul [instead] with troubling desires for a paltry few days, and then death takes him away and he is forever barred from whatever he coveted? God protect us from this!

We shall adduce some descriptions and virtues of those who strive (mujtahidin) so as to cause the seeker to desire striving (ijtihad) in imitation of them:

Said the Messenger of God (may God bless him and grant him peace), 'God bless a people whom others thought ill, but they are not ill.' Al-Hasan [al-Basrf] said [in explanation], 'Worship had worn them out (ajhadathum al- 'ibada).'

God said, And those who give what they give with fearful hearts. Al-Hasan explained that they act piously as they do because they fear that this may not save them from God's punishment.

Said the Messenger of God, 'Blessed is he who lives long and acts well.'

It is related that God Exalted asked His angels, 'Why do my servants strive?' They said, 'Our Lord, you fill them with fear about something and they are frightened you make them long for something and they long for it.' A And God said, 'What if my servants should see Me? They would strive even more.'

Said al-Hasan, 'I have known people and befriended some who neither rejoice in nor regret anything of this world; it is more worthless in their eyes than this dust you tread upon with your feet. Each of them could live out his life without a gown to wrap himself with and without ever ordering his household to prepare food or putting anything between himself and the ground. I realised that they act according to the book of their Lord and the way of their Prophet. When night falls upon them, they rise to their feet and lay down their faces, 'and tears run down their cheeks, whispering to their Lord to spare them. Whenever they do a good deed, they rejoice and eagerly give thanks for it, asking God to accept it. They grieve whenever they commit a misdeed and asked God to forgive them what they did. By God, they persist in this. By God, they were not free of sin, nor were they saved but through pardon.'

It is told that while people were visiting 'Umar b. Abd al-Aziz during his illness a gaunt youth was present. 'Umar asked him, 'Young lad, what has brought upon you what I see?' The young man said, 'O Commander of the Faithful, sickness and disease.'

'I seek honesty from you,' said 'Umar.

'O Commander of the Faithful, I tasted the sweetness of this world and found it bitter. Its glitter and sweetness are in significant to me; its gold and granite are of equal value. It is as if I were gazing at my Lord's throne while people drive towards Paradise and Hell. Therefore, I go thirsty by day and sleepless by night. Everything I do is meagre and puny beside the reward and punishment of God.'

Abu Nu 'aym stated that Da'ud al-Ta'l used to drink bread in water instead of just eating bread. When asked about this, he said, '[The difference in time] between chewing bread and drinking bread soup is the recitation of fifty Quranic verses.'

One day a man came to him and said, 'The roof of your house has a broken beam.' He replied, 'O my brother's son, I have not had to look at the roof of this house for twenty years.' They disliked wasteful gazing as much as they did prattle.

Said Muhammad b. Abd al- 'Aziz, 'We sat with Ahmad b. al-RizzIn from morning to afternoon. He was oblivious of everything to his right and to his left. Asked about this, he said, "God Almighty and Majestic created the two eyes of the servant for beholding God's majesty. Against him who looks on without reflection a sin is recorded."'

Said the wife of Masruq, 'Masruq's feet were always swollen because of the length of his prayers.' She said, 'By God, I used to sit behind him and weep out of pity for him!'

Said Abu Darda, 'I would desire not a single day of life if not for three things: thirsting at midday for God, prostrating before God in the middle of the night and sitting with people who select the best of words just as one selects the best of fruits. ' I2

Al-Aswad b. Yazld used to persevere in worship and to fast in the heat until his body turned green and yellow.* 'Ulquma b. Qays asked him, 'Why do you torment your soul?'

'I seek its honour,' he answered.

He used to fast until his body turned green and to pray until he dropped. Then Anas b. Malik and al-Hasan [al-Basrl] came to him. They said to him, 'God Almighty and Majestic has not commanded you to do all this.'

He replied, 'I am a servant, owned [by God]. I do not claim to be humble without being so.'

One of those who strive prayed a thousand rak'as a day until his legs gave way. Seated, he then prayed a thousand more rak'as. Performing the afternoon prayers, he sat with his legs drawn and then said, 'How strange that human beings should ask of Thee other than Thee! How strange that they should take comfort in other than Thee; indeed that their hearts should be lit up by remembrance of other than Thee.'

Thabit al-Bunani loved 15 prayer and used to say, 'Lord, if You permit anyone to pray (salat) to You from his grave, then permit me to pray from my grave.' 6

Said Junayd, 'I know of no one more devoted to worship than Sari [al-Saqatl]. Having lived ninety-eight years, he was seen lying down only at death.' 7

Said Harith b. Sa 'd, 'Some people came upon a monk and saw what he had done to himself with intense striving. They questioned him about this and he said, "This is nothing like the horrors that people shall see and of which they are ignorant. They devote themselves to no more than their portions [in this world], forgetting their greatest portion [that lies] with their Lord." The people then wept, one and all.'

On the authority of Abu Muhammad al-Mughazill, it is said that Abu Muhammad al-Jariri had gone to Mecca one year. He neither slept nor spoke; leaned on neither a pillar nor a wall; and never stretched out his legs. Abu Bakr al-Kattani passed by him [one day]. He greeted him, saying, 'O Muhammad, how are you capable of such devotion?'

He answered, '[God] knows my inner truthfulness and He supports me in my outer.' Al-Kattani bowed and turned away in reflection.

A man A once said, 'I went to see Fath al-Mawsili and saw he had his palms out-stretched. He was weeping and, I noticed, tears dripped from his fingers. When I approached him, his tears had a reddish tinge. I said, "By God, do you weep blood, O Fath?"

'He replied, "Had you not entreated me by God, I would not have told you. Yes, I weep blood."

'So I asked him, "For what reason do you shed tears?"

'He replied, "[I weep] for attending tardily to the duty of God's right. And I weep tears of blood lest my tears [alone] be in vain." After he died I saw him in a dream and asked him, "How has God treated you?"

""He forgave me."

""What did He make of your tears?"

""My Lord, Mighty and Majestic, drew me near and asked me, 'O Fath, why the tears?' I said, 'Lord, for failing to attend to the duty of Thy right.' 'What about the blood?' He asked. 'Because my tears might not be allotted to me.' He said to me, 'O Fath, what do you intend by all this? By My power and majesty, your two caretaker angels A have kept your record for forty years and it has no fault.'""

It is told that, as they set out on a journey, some people deviated from the path and came across a reclusive monk. They called out to him. He looked down upon them from his hermitage.

They said, 'O monk, we have lost our way. What is the way?' He motioned with his head to the sky. The people understood what he meant and said, 'Monk, we beseech you, will you answer us?'

'Ask, but not too much. For the day shall never return, nor life be repeated, and the seeker is quick [to seek].'

The people were bewildered by what he said. They asked, 'Monk, how will people fare on the morrow with their Lord?'

'Depending on their intentions,' he said.

'Advise us,' they pleaded.

'Take provisions in proportion to your journey. The best provision is what achieves the purpose.' He led them to the path then betook himself to his hermitage.

Said Abd al-Wahid b. Zayd [al-Basri], 'I came to the hermit age of one of the monks of China and called him, "O monk," but he did not answer. I called a second time. No answer. And a third time. He then looked down upon me and said, "O man, I am no monk. A monk is someone who is frightened of God A in His heaven and aggrandises Him in His glory; who is forbearing when God afflicts him; who is satisfied with His decree; who praises Him for His blessings; who thanks Him for His bounties; who is humbled by His greatness and subdued by His might; who yields in awe of Him; who thinks about His reckoning and punishment. He fasts by day and holds vigil by night. Thoughts of the Fire and the questioning by the Almighty keep him awake. That is the monk. I am but a rapacious dog. I have imprisoned myself in this hermitage away from people in order not to perturb them."

'I asked him, "Monk, what separates people from God after 20 they had known Him?"

"Brother, only the love for this world and its glitter separates people from God. This is because [the world] is a place of sins and crimes. The sensible man casts it from his heart. He turns to God in repentance for his crime and accepts what brings him closer to his Lord.'" 21

Da'ud al-Ta'l was told, 'If only you combed your whiskers.' He answered, 'But then I would be idle.' 2

Uways [b. Amir] al-Qarani used to say, 'This is a night for kneeling,' and he would kneel [in prayer] all night. The next night, he used to say, 'This is a night for prostration.' And he would spend the whole night in prostration.

It is told that when 'Utba [b. Aban] al-Ghulam turned [to God in repentance], he ceased to enjoy eating and drinking. His mother then told him, 'If only you were kind to yourself.' He said, 'Kindness is what I desire. Leave me to a little hardship for much ease.' 4

Masruq went on the pilgrimage and when he slept it was only in [ritual] prostration.

Said Sufyan al-Thawri, 'In the morning, the people of secrecy 3 are praised and at death the people of devoutness.' 6

Said 'Abd Allah b. Da'ud [al-Hamdani], 'When any of them reached forty years old, he folded up his blanket that is, he did not sleep the whole night.'

And Abu al-Hasan Kahmas b. al-Hasan used to perform a thousand cycles [of prayer] every day and say to himself, 'Get up, O Ye shelter for every evil.' When he became weak, he limited himself to five hundred cycles [of prayer] and used to cry out, 'Half of my work gone.' 7

The daughter of al-Rabi 'b. Khuthaym used to ask him, 'O my father, why is it that I see people sleeping but you do not sleep?'

'O my daughter, your father fears slumber,'* he said.

When al-Rabi 's mother saw how much he wept and remained sleepless she asked him, 'O my son, have you perchance slain someone?'

'Yes, my mother.'

'Who is he that we may search for his family to grant you forgiveness. By God, if they only knew how you are now, they would surely be merciful and forgive you!'

'It is my own self, O mother.' 9

Said [Abu Hafs] 'Umar, the nephew of Bishr b. al-Harith [al-Hafi], 'I heard my uncle Bishr b. al-Harith. say to my mother, "Sister, my abdomen and my sides assail me." My mother said to him, "Brother, permit me to recommend you some broth with a handful of flour I have. Drinking it will improve your insides."

'He said to her while rubbing himself, "I fear being asked where I have obtained this flour and knowing not what to say." My mother wept, he wept and I wept with them.'

And 'Umar said, 'My mother found Bishr in intense pain.

He began to breath weakly. She told him, “Brother, I wish your mother had not given birth to me. By God, my liver is torn to pieces 2 for [the state] I find you in.” 31

‘I heard him tell her, “And I wish my mother had not given birth to me and if she did, that her breasts had not granted me milk.”’ Umar added that his mother used to weep for him day and night.

Al-Rabl 'said that he went to Uways and found him seated, having performed the morning prayer. ‘And he sat and I sat, saying [to myself] that I will not distract him from the rosary. A He remained in his place until the noon prayer. Then he rose for the afternoon prayer. He later sat down until the sunset prayer and stayed in his place to perform the night prayer. He remained seated there for the morning prayer. Then his eyes prevailed upon him and he said, “Lord, I seek refuge in Thee from the sleepy eye and the insatiable stomach.” So I said, “This suffices for me from him,” and I returned’.

Looking at Uways, a man once said, ‘O Abd Allah, why do you seem ill?’ He answered, ‘How could Uways not be ill? The sick are fed but Uways does not eat. The sick sleep but Uways does not.’

Said Ahmad b. Harb, ‘How odd for someone who knows that Paradise stands adorned above him and that Hellfire is kindled below him how could he sleep between them.’

One of the ascetics once said, ‘I went to Ibrahim b. Adham and found him performing the night prayer, so I sat down in wait. He wrapped himself in a woollen cloak and laid himself down. He never turned from one side to the other once until morning broke. Then, the muezzin began his call to prayer, and [Ibrahim] sprang up to pray without having done his ablutions. This burrowed into my breast. I told him, “God be merciful upon you. You slept, recumbent, the entire night without thereafter renewing your ablutions!”

‘He answered, “The whole night I roamed sometimes the gardens of Paradise, sometimes the gorges of Hellfire. Is there sleep in this?”’

Said Thabit al-Bunanl, ‘I saw two men, one of whom prayed and could reach his bed only by crawling.’ 2

It is said that Abu Bakr b. Ayyash never once lay on his side on a bed in forty years. He developed a cataract in one eye, but for twenty years his family knew nothing of it.

It is said that Samnun [b. Hamza] used to perform five hundred cycles of prayer every day.

And Abu Bakr al-Mutawwa 'I said, 'In my youth, my private devotion every 34 day and night was to recite the verse Say: He is God, the one and only 35 thirty-one or forty thousand times' though this is doubted by the transmitter.

If you saw Mansur b. al-Mu 'tamar, you would say he was a man afflicted with misfortune, crippled of limb, muffled of voice, moist of eyes. If you stirred him, his eyes would appear as four.* His mother asked him, 'What have you done to yourself? You cry the whole night without stop. Have you injured someone, have you killed anyone?'

'O mother,' he said, 'I best know what I have done with myself.' 6

Amir b. Abd Allah was asked, 'How patient are you with the night vigil and with thirst at the midday heat?'

He replied, 'Have I not deferred the day's meal to the night, and the night's slumber to the day? There is nothing great here.'

He used to say, 'I have found nothing like Paradise, he who seeks it slumbers; I have found nothing like Hell, he who wishes to escape it slumbers.' At nightfall, he would said, 'The heat of the Fire takes away sleep'. He did not sleep until morning's rising. When day arrived he would said, 'The heat of the Fire takes away sleep,' and he became emaciated for lack of sleep. When night fell he would said, 'He goes forth who is fearful.' In the morning, he praised the people of secrecy .

A man used to say, 'Having accompanied Amir b. Abd al-Qays for four months, I never saw him sleep either by day or by night .

It is told that a companion of All b. Abi Talib's once said, 'I performed the morning prayer behind All. When he finished the prayer, he turned to his left in distress and remained there until sunrise. Then he turned his hands over A and said, "By God, I saw [with my own eyes] Muhammad's Companions. [Alas,] today I see no one like them. They used to rise in the morning dishevelled, dusty and pale, after spending the night for God prostrated and standing and reciting God's Book and alternating between their feet and their foreheads. When they invoked God they quivered 39 as the tree quivers on a windy day. Their eyes shed tears that soaked their clothes. It is as if people are unaware!"' Meaning those around him now .

Abu Muslim [Abd Allah b. Thawbat] al-Khawlani hung a

whip in his place of worship at home in order to fill himself with fear. He used to say to his soul, 'Rise! By God, I shall move forward despite thee, until the weariness is thine, not mine.' And when languor came, he grabbed his whip and struck his thigh with it, 'You are more deserving of a lashing than my mule.' 1

He said, 'Do Muhammad's Companions think that they will have him to themselves without us? No, by God, we will jostle them hard 42 for [proximity to] him that they may know they have left behind them those who are worthy.'

Safwan b. Salim's thighs became stiff from standing too long [in prayer]. His reasoning was that had he been told that the Day of Judgement would be tomorrow he would not have been able to find more to do.

When winter set in, he used to lay on the roof that the cold may afflict him. In summer, he slept inside houses that the heat may keep him from sleeping. He died in prostration. And he used to say, 'Lord, I long to meet Thee and so long to meet me.'

Said al-Qasim b. Muhammad, 'I went out one morning. It was my habit whenever I went out to go first to greet 'A'isha. That day, I went to her and she was she performing her forenoon prayer and she was reciting, But God granted us favour and protected us from the scorching wind. She wept, supplicated and repeated the verse. I stood there until I wearied, while she remained as she was. When I saw this, I went to the market. I told myself I would finish my chore and return. I finished my chore and returned but she was the same. She repeated the verse, wept and supplicated.' 5

Muhammad b. Ishaq recounted that when Abd al-Rahman b. al-Aswad arrived as a pilgrim, he was hurt in one foot. So, he prayed on one foot. And the morning prayer he performed with the previous night's ablution. A 46

One man said, 'My fear of death is only that it might keep me from the night prayer.'

Said All b. Abl Talib, 'The righteous (salihun) usually have a pale complexion from sleeplessness, their eyes bleary from weeping, their lips withered from fasting and upon them lies the dust of the meek.' 7

Al-Hasan al-Basri was asked, 'Why are those who keep the night vigil best?' 'Because they are alone with the Merciful. He envelops them with a light from Him. He clothes them with His light.' 8

And Amir b. Abd al-Qays [al-Anbar al-Basri] used to say, 'Lord, you created me without consulting me; you take my life

away without apprising me; you created with me a foe, who is second nature to me and who sees me but I do not see him. Then you ask me to restrain myself. Lord, how can I be restrained if you do not restrain me? Lord, this world has only worries and pains. The Hereafter has the penalty and the account. So, where is the repose and the joy?' 9

Ja 'far b. Muhammad said that 'Utba [b. Aban] al-Ghulam used to pass the night with three cries. After praying the night prayer he would place his head between his knees in thought. After spending a third of the night he would let out a cry and placed his head between his knees in thought. When the second third of the night was over, he let out a cry and placed his head between his knees in thought. At predawn, he let out a cry. Ja 'far b. Muhammad said that he asked someone from Basra about this. 'Do not bother with his crying, but rather with what has between cries led him to cry out.' 10

It is told that al-Qasim b. Rashid al-Shaybani said that Zum 'a was accompanying us to al-Muhassab. A With him were wife and daughters. He prayed for a lengthy night. At predawn, he called out at the top of his voice, 'O ye, married travelling companions, will you sleep all the night? Will you not rise and wander about?' They sprung up. And then he heard those who wept here, a duplicator there, a reciter here and someone doing ablutions there. When morning arrived he called out at the top of his voice in the morning did he praise the people of secrecy.

A learned person once said, 'God has servants upon whom He bestows his blessing and who acknowledge Him. He broadened their hearts and they obey Him. They rely upon Him and submit creation and [every] matter [alike] to Him. Their hearts are the sources of limpid certainty, houses of wisdom, coffers of grandeur, treasures of power. They come and go among people, yet their hearts rove the realm of the heavenly kingdom, taking shelter in the veil of the invisible, and then return with rarities 51 of gainful subtleties. No one can describe it. In their interior they are like comely brocade; in their exterior, like kerchiefs offered to one desiring their humility. This state is inaccessible through striving, but as a favour from God, one bestowed upon whomever He wishes.'

A righteous man said, 'While travelling in the hills of Jerusalem I descended into a valley and suddenly a voice rang out. The voice carried well in those hills. I followed it and came upon a garden 52 with trees all round. A man stood in it repeating this [Quranic] phrase, On the day when every soul shall be confronted with what good it has wrought. ..but God cautions you about Himself. 1 sat behind him to listen to his words as he repeated this verse, when he suddenly let out a cry and fell in a swoon.

‘I said, “What a pity! This pains me.” And I awaited his recovery.

‘He recovered after an hour and I heard him say, “I seek Thy protection from the station of the deniers. I seek Thy protection from the deeds of the untrue. I seek Thy protection from the shunning of the heedless.” Then he said, “Before Thee are humbled the hearts of the fearful and to Thee flee the hopes of the slack. Humbled are the hearts of the cognisant ('arifun) before Thy greatness.”

‘Dusting off his hands, he said, “What have I to do with this world? And what has this world to do with me? O world, have thy kin and those accustomed to thy comforts. Go to your intimates. Deceive them!” Then he said, “Where have the past generations and those who lived aforetime gone? They are put to the test in the dust, and in time they perish.”

‘So, I called out to him, “O servant of God, I have been standing behind you all day waiting for you to become free.”

‘He replied, “How can one be free who is assailed by time and whom time hastens on who fears death may overtake him? Or, how can anyone be free whose days are gone but whose sins remain?” Then he said, “It’s up to you. I anticipate every hard ship.” He then turned away from me for an hour. And he recited, And God shall confront them with something they could never reckon. si

‘He cried out once again, louder than the first time, and fell in a swoon. I thought he had surely given up the ghost. I approached him while he was agitated. Recovering, he said, “Who am I? What has happened to me? Please 59 grant me my sins. A Honour me with Thy veil. Efface my offences with the dignity of Thy face when I stand before Thee.”

‘I told him, “I urge you by the One whom you hope from and upon whom you rely, to speak to me.”

‘He replied, “Take the words of he whose words benefit you and shun the words of the one debased by his sins. Since God has willed it, I have been here fighting Iblls and he fights me. He found nothing to help him draw me away from where I was except you so be gone, O Deceived One! You have stopped my tongue [from remembering God] and part of my heart tilted towards your utterance. I seek refuge in God from your evil. I wish He would spare me His displeasure and grace me with His mercy.”

The [narrator] finally said [to himself], ‘I shall not distract this friend of God for fear of punishment on the very spot on

which I stand. I turned away and left him.'

A righteous man said, 'While travelling on one of my journeys, I turned to rest beneath a tree. Suddenly I found an old man looking at me. He said, "O man, get up! For death dies not." He then wandered about and I followed him. I listened to him as he said, "Every soul shall taste death 60 Lord give me Thy blessings in death."

'I added for him 61 "and beyond death."

'He said, "He who is certain about what is beyond death readies the cover of prudence. He has nothing in this world that endures." And he said, "O Ye to whose Face every face offers itself, whiten my face with a gaze upon Thee. Fill my heart with love for Thee. Protect me from the ignominy oP 3 Your rebuke on the morrow. It is about time that I should be ashamed in front of Thee. It is about time that I turn back from avoidance of Thee."

'He also said, "Without Your clemency, my years would not be enough for me. B Without Your pardon, my hope would not extend to what is with Thee." Then he departed and left me.'

This meaning has been emphasized in:

Emaciated of body, heavy of heart,
at Qunna, valley's bottom, ye shall find him.
Bemoaning sins and disgraces,

Their gravity roiling sweet slumber.

His fears astir and growing,
he calls out, 'Succour me, O my support!
for Ye knoweth well my encounters,
ever lenient with people's oversights.'

It is also said:

Sweeter than the delight in beautiful women
as they flush in comely dress...

So the contrite one flees kith and wealth,
roves from place to place,

To be forgotten, to be alone,

in worship to triumph as he desires 65

His pleasure recital wherever a master he finds,
and remembrance through the heart and the tongue.

Upon death a herald to him comes
to announce deliverance from disgrace.

Then he fathoms what comforts he wanted and desired
in the chambers of the heart.

Kariz b. Wubra 67 used to recite the whole Qur'an thrice every day. In worship he was as diligent as can be and was told, 'You exert yourself in worship.'

He answered, 'What is the world's duration?'

'Seven thousand years,' he was told.

'How long is the Day of Resurrection?' 8 he asked.

'Fifty thousand years.'

'How can anyone of you then fail to strive seven days to secure that Day?'

In other words, if you lived the duration of the world, strove for seven thousand years and were saved from [the terrors of] a single day lasting fifty thousand years, your gain would be great. And you would have been right in seeking this. But how short still your life and endless the Hereafter! 69

This is how the righteous forefathers lived in steadfast commitment and vigilance of the soul. Therefore, however recalcitrant your soul may be with you and averse to consistent worship, acquaint yourself with the states of [the righteous], for rare are those who resemble them today. If you can observe someone who takes them as a model, that person is healthiest of heart and inspires imitation best, because reporting is not like observing. If you are unable [to observe], then do not overlook learning about the states of [other people]. 'If it's not a camel, 'tis a goat' choose for yourself between, on the one hand, their emulation and being in their midst and company, for they are discerning, wise, and have religious insight; and, on the other, emulating the ignorant and heedless of your age.

Hence, do not accept [your soul's] affiliation with the foolish or be content with comparison with dolts, giving preference to contradicting what intelligent people do. If your soul tells you the latter are powerful men who cannot be emulated, consider then the state of striving women and say to yourself, 'O soul, do not refrain from being weaker than women.' I belittle the man who is not equal to a woman either in her religion or mundane affairs.'

Let us now mention a snippet from the states of striving women (mujahidat). It is told that whenever Hablba al- 'Adawiyya prayed in the night, she would do so 7 ° on a terrace that belonged to her, she would tighten her garment and veil and say, 'Lord, the stars have slipped away, the eyes fallen asleep; the kings have bolted their gates and every lover is alone with his beloved. This is my station between Your hands.' Then she turned to prayer. With the break of dawn, she said, 'Lord, the night has stolen away and this day waxes bright. I wish I knew if You accepted my night, for I would be delighted; or that you rejected it of me, for I would then be blameworthy. By your Majesty, ever shall I persist the remainder of my life. By your Majesty, should you chase me away from Your gate , I would not stir from the generosity and munificence You have shown me.' 3

It is told that 'Ujra used to spend the night [in prayer]. She was sightless. At dawn she called with her grieving voice, 'Towards Thee do worshippers traverse the gloom of the nights, racing, racing to Thy mercy and to the blessing of Thy pardon. Therefore, Thee I ask, no one else, to make me foremost among those who race forth; to raise me towards Thee at the loftiest heights of those nearest You and to keep close to Your righteous servants. You are the most merciful of the merciful, greatest of the great, noblest of the noble, O Noble One.' She sank [to the ground] in prostration, which was heard [in Heaven], and she would go on supplicating and weeping until dawn.

Said Yahya b. Bistam, 'I used to take part in gatherings with Sha 'wana. I saw how she mourned and wept. So I said to my companion, "If only we went to her while she is alone and commend her to be gentler with herself." He said, "Go to it!"

'So, we went to her and I told her, "If you were gentler with yourself and lessened your weeping a little, you would better attain what you want."

'She cried, then said, "By God, I wish to cry to the end of my tears, then to weep with blood until not a drop of blood is left in any of my members. I must weep, I must weep" she kept repeating this until she fainted.'? 5

Muhammad b. Mu adh related that a devout woman told him, 'I dreamt that I was brought to Paradise. I saw the denizens of Paradise standing by its gates. I asked why the denizens of Paradise should be standing there. Someone replied, "They came out to behold this woman adorning the Gardens with her arrival."

""And who is that woman?" I asked.

“A black lady [of God] from the people of Abilla 76 called Sha 'wana,” came the reply. “My sister, by God!” I said. As I said this, she was welcomed in on a stately camel flying in the air. When I saw her, I called out, “O sister, from your place do you not see my place? Pray for me that, your Master might admit me with you.”

‘She smiled at me and said, “Your arrival is not due. But keep to two things I give you. Bring grief to bear upon your heart, prefer love for God to your [worldly] passions; and then whenever you die it will not be to your detriment.”’ 77

Said Abd Allah b. al-Hasan, ‘I once had a Greek servant-girl. I used to admire her. One night while she slept next to me I woke to touch her, but could not find her, so I rose [from bed] to look for her. She lay prostrated, saying, “By Thy love for me forgive my sins?”’

‘I told her not to say “By Thy love for me” but “by my love for Thee.”’

‘She said, “No, master. By His love for me He has taken me from polytheism to Islam. And by His love He opened my eyes many of His people are asleep.”’ 79

Said Abu Hashim al-Qurashi, ° ‘A woman from the people of Yemen, said to be high-bred, arrived and went over to one of our homes. At night I heard her wailing and sobbing. One day I said to a woman servant of mine, “See what this woman is doing.” [Then,] he continued, ‘The servant watched her and had found her doing nothing but gazing at the heavens while facing the qibla, and saying, “You created a noblewoman, then provided her with your blessings from one situation to another. Every situation You [bestow upon] her has its goodness, every trial its beauty to her. Despite this she is exposed to Your wrath, being aware of disobedience to Thee, one slip at a time. Do You think her unaware that You know of her evil deeds when You are the Omniscient and the All-aware?”’

Said Dhu al-Nun al-Misri, ‘One night I was leaving the Valley of Canaan. I trekked up past the valley, when a dark figure drew towards me weeping and saying, And God shall confront them with something they could never reckon . * 3 The dark figure approached and then, lo, it was a woman wearing a woollen garment and a pot in her hand. Unafraid of me, she said, “Who are you?”

“An exile,” said 1 .

“And is there exile with God, man?” she said.

'I wept at her words.

'She asked me, "What makes you weep?"

""The remedy hit upon 85 a festering ailment, thus speeding its success."

""But why should you cry if you are sincere?"

""God's mercy on you! So the sincere should not weep?"

""No."

""Why not?"

""Because weeping is rest for the heart." With these words, I fell silent.'

Said Ahmad b. 'All, 'We sought Ghufayra's 86 permission to enter, but she hid from sight. We continued to wait by the door. When she learned of this, she rose to open it for us, and I heard her say, "Lord, I seek protection in Thee from the one who distracts me from Thy remembrance." With this she opened the door and we entered her house. We told her, "O lady of God, pray for us."

'She said, "May God count your reception in my house as forgiveness." Then she said to us, "For forty years Ata al-Sulam" never looked up to heaven. But he chanced to gaze upon it once. For that he fell into a swoon and was afflicted with hernia in his belly. If only Ghufayra 88 could raise her head without disobeying. If only she could disobey without repeating it." 89

A righteous man said, 'One day I went to the market with an Abyssinian servant-girl. I told her to keep to a spot near the market and left for a chore, telling her, "Do not leave until I attend to you." 90 When I returned I found she was not at the spot.

I headed for my house infuriated with her. When she saw me she recognized the anger on my face.

""O master, do not be hasty with me, for you sat me where I saw no one remembering God Exalted. I feared He would strike this place down." I was surprised by her words and declared to her, "You are free."

'She said, "What I did is bad. I used to serve you and claim two rewards. Now, one of them is gone." 91

Said Ibn Ala al-Sa 'dl, 'I had a cousin called Burayra. She was devoutly observant and avidly read the Book. A When she came to

a verse that mentioned Hellfire she wept. She continued to weep until her weeping took away her sight. Her relations said, "Let us hurry to this woman to reproach her for her excessive weeping." We went to her and said, "O Burayra, what has become of you?"

'She said, "We have become guests residing in a land of exile, waiting to be called and to answer."

"But this weeping, it has taken away your sight!" we told her.

"If there be any good in my eyes, then it does not avail them whatever has been taken away from them in this world. If there be any evil, then they should weep longer than this." Then she turned away. Those present said, "Let us leave for her state, by God, is different from ours."

Mu ad ha al- 'Adawiyya used to say when day broke, 'This is the day I die.' She took no nourishment until evening. At nightfall she would say, 'This is the night I die,' and prayed until morning.

Said Abu Sulayman al-Darani, 'I stayed at the house of Rabfa [al-Axlawiyya] one night. She rose to go to a prayer-niche of hers. I myself went to one side of the house. She stayed up until dawn. At dawn I asked, "What is the reward of the one who gave us the strength to rise this night?"

'She answered, "His reward is that you should observe the fast the next day for Him.'" 93

In her supplication, Sha 'wana used to say, 'My Lord, how intensely I desire to meet Thee, how great my hope for Thy reward! You are the gracious one in whom the hope of the hopeful never fails, in whom the longing of those who long is never thwarted.

'My Lord, if my term is nigh and my deed fails to draw me closer to Thee, then my deficient ways make for acknowledgement of the offence. When You pardon, who is more worthy of that than Thee? When You chastise, who is more just in that than Thee?

'My Lord, I wronged my soul by paying too much attention to it and only Thy comely sight remained for it. Woe to it if Ye should not save it.

'My Lord, You have been charitable to me every day of my life remove not Thy charity after I die. Verily, I ask of Him who cared for me during my life, in His beneficence, to grant me pardon upon death through His forgiveness.

'My Lord, how can I despair that you will look well upon me

after death, when You bring me only the beautiful in my life.

‘My Lord, if my sins frighten me so, then my love for Thee gives me sanctuary. Therefore, take charge of what affair of mine befits Thee. Bring Thy favour to someone misled by [her] own ignorance.

‘My Lord, if You wanted me to suffer affront, why do You guide me? If You wanted my debasement, then why shield me? So, benefit me with what You guide me in. Enhance for me that with which You shield me.

‘My Lord, I do not believe that You will refuse me in a need that I have given my life for.

‘My Lord, had I not been tempted by sins, I would not fear Thy punishment. Had I not known Thy nobility, I would not hope for Thy reward.’ 4

Said [Ibrahim b. Ahmad] al-Khawwas, ‘We went to Rihla al-Abida. She had fasted until she had shrivelled up; wept 95 until she went blind; prayed until she was lame. She prayed sitting down. We greeted her, then reminded her of something about [God’s] pardon to ease her affairs. She sighed then said, “My knowledge of my soul has wounded my heart and hurt my liver. My God, I wish God had never created me and that I were nothing.” Then she turned to pray.’

If you are among the steadfast (murabitun) who are vigilant, self-examining, then it behoves you to study the states of those men and women who are striving, in order to spur your enthusiasm and increase your aspiration. Beware of looking to your contemporaries. Most people on earth you heed lead away from the path of God.

There are countless stories of the those who strive. However, what we have mentioned suffice for illustration. If you desire more, you ought to devote yourself to studying the Book of the Ornament of God’s Friends, A which contains an explanation of the state of the Prophet’s Companions, the generation that succeeded them and those after them. Pausing there will make clear to you and your contemporaries your distance from the [original] people of religion.

Your soul may say to you to look to contemporaries. [It may say] that previously the good was prevalent because many upheld it; that if you contradict your contemporaries now, they will consider you insane and mock you; so, agree with them on whatever preoccupies and matters to them, for what applies to them applies to you too. Generalized, calamity becomes

tolerable.

Beware of descending by the rope of the soul's deception or being misled by its forgery. Say to your soul, 'Do you see that if a torrential flood drowned the inhabitants in the very places they stood on, unaware of their true situation due to their ignorance; and if you left them and boarded a vessel to save yourself from drowning would you then consider that the calamity is tolerable because it is generalised. Or, would you withdraw 96 your approval of them and consider them doltish for their doings and guard against what may befall you?'

But if you forgo their approval for fear of drowning and its torment, which lasts but a moment, how could you fail to flee the eternal torment to which you are exposed at every turn? Would calamity then be tolerable when generalised? The people of Hell-fire are too distracted to discern the general from the specific.

The unbelievers are ruined only by agreeing with the people of their time, who say, We found our fathers following a religion and we shall follow in their footsteps .

If you preoccupy yourself with censuring your soul and inducing it to renewed striving, and it renounces its rejection of censure, reproach and rebuke of it, and it learns to see its [earlier] misconception of itself, perhaps then it will be driven 99 away from its oppression.

CHAPTER SIX

The Sixth Steadfast Commitment:
Self-Reproach and Self-censure

K NOW THAT YOUR WORST ENEMY 1 is your soul inside you. It was created to incite ill and predisposed toward evil and the desertion of the good. You are bidden to purify, reform and lead it through continual subjugation to worship of its Lord and Creator. You must forbid it its passions and wean it from its pleasures. Neglect it and it runs and wanders away, after which you will not [be able to] vanquish it. Reproach, censure and blame it, on the other hand, and it will be the same self-reproaching soul by which God has sworn. A

If you aspire to the tranquil soul (al-nafs al-mutma'inna) 2 which is called upon to join the ranks of God's servants, pleasing and content (radiya mardiyaa), then do not neglect for one hour to remind and censure it. Do not occupy yourself with admonishing others if you have not firstly admonished yourself.

God's inspiration to Jesus son of Mary (may God grant him peace) was, 'O son of Mary, admonish yourself. When it is admonished, then admonish people. Otherwise, be ashamed of Me.'

God has said, And remind, for reminding benefits the faithful . Your way forward is to attend to your soul and to convince it of its folly and stupidity, and [to ensure] it never draws strength from its cleverness and its own guidance. Associated with foolishness, it will only grow in haughtiness and pride. Therefore, you should say to it:

Woe unto you, O soul, how great your ignorance is! You claim wisdom, acuity and cleverness, but you are more stupid and foolish than other people.

Do you not know that Paradise and Hellfire are before you, and that you are only a short distance from one of them? 7 Why, then, do you rejoice and mock and amuse yourself so, when you are needed in this weighty matter? You may well abscond today or tomorrow I see that you think death far, though God thinks it near. Do you not know that everything to come is near and that the distant is what will not come? Do you not know that death comes suddenly without a messenger, and with neither appointment or collusion; that [death] does not come to one thing and leaves another; that it comes in winter as in summer, summer as in winter, day as in night, night as in day, childhood as in youth, youth as in childhood? Indeed, any breath may contain sudden death. If sudden death does not come, then illness will and then lead to death.

Why, O soul, do you not prepare for death, which is nearer to you than anything else. Have you not pondered God's words, The reckoning of people approaches, but, knowing not, they turn away. No reminder comes to them from their Lord but they listen to it in jest, their hearts amused ? 10

Woe unto you, O soul, if you are wont to sin against God because you believe He is not looking, then how great your unbelief! If you know that He sees you, how great your insolence and how negligible your shame!

O soul, if a servant of yours, nay, a brother, should confront you with something you dislike, what anger and loathing would you harbour for him? Yet, how recklessly you then expose your self to God's loathing, anger and stern punishment!

Do you think you can bear His wrath? Far from it! If your cockiness has lulled you away from His painful wrath, then try

for yourself! Put yourself under the sun or in the bathhouse for an hour. Bring your fingers close to the flame and find out how you bear up.

Or are you deluded about God's nobility and favour, His disinterestedness with respect to your acts of obedience and worship?

Why do you not rely on His kindness in the weighty matters of your world? When a foe pursues you, why do you devise a stratagem to repel him without relying on God's kindness?

When a need pulls you towards a worldly desire which nothing but gold and silver pieces can fulfil, why do you exhaust yourself in pursuing it and acquiring it with stratagems, instead of relying on God's kindness to lead you to a treasure or to subordinate a servant of His to your need with neither an effort nor a request from you. Do you consider God beneficent in the Hereafter but not in this world?

You should know that there is no substitute for the Way of God (sunnat Allah); 11 that the Lord of this world and the next is One; and That man shall have only what he strives for .

Woe unto you, O soul, how amazing are your hypocrisy and pretensions! You lay claim to faith with the tongue while the trace of hypocrisy is evident in you. Has your Lord and Master not said to you, There is no heast on earth hut its sustenance depends on God? 14 And about the Hereafter, He said, That man shall have only what he strives for .

He has specifically taken upon Himself your worldly affairs and spared you pursuit of them. But you deny this through your actions. You rush headlong in pursuit [of the world] in the manner of a spellbound dotard. He has entrusted the matter of the Hereafter to your striving; yet, you shun it in the manner of a fool disdainful.

This is not a sign of faith! If faith were merely verbal (bi'l - lisan), why 16 would the hypocrites [be found] at the lowest rung of Hell?

Woe unto you, O soul, it is as if you do not believe in the Day of Reckoning, but think rather that when you die you will be set free and released. Far from it! Do you think that you will be left alone? 17 Were you not a drop of sperm emitted, then a blood clot, then something by design and order? Can He who has the power to do this not quicken the dead? 18

If this is what you harbour in yourself, then what a denier you are and how ignorant! You deny that that is from whence

He created you from a drop of sperm He created and cherished you, eased your way, then took back your life and caused you to be buried. Will you deny His word? Yet, He shall resurrect you, if He wills it. If you are not a denier, why are you not on your guard?

If a Jew A informed you that the most delectable food may harm you in your illness, you would avoid or abandon it ²¹ and exert yourself in this. Does the speech of the prophets, who are supported by miracles and the Word of God in the books He has revealed, influence you less than the words of the Jewish [doctor] who counsels you against conjecture, guesswork and supposition [based on] inadequate understanding and knowledge? The wonder is that if a child warned you about a scorpion lodged in your clothing, you would toss away your clothes immediately without asking the child for evidence or proof.

Are the words of the prophets, the learned, the scholars and all the saints lesser for you than the words of a boy, who counts among the unwise? Or, are the heat of Hell, its shackles and chains, its infernal tree, pikes, pus, searing sandstorms, vipers and scorpions less significant ²³ for you than one scorpion, the pain from which you will feel for a day or less?

These are not the actions of reasonable people. No, if your state were revealed to the beasts they would laugh at you and ridicule your mind.

O soul, if you know all this and believe in it, why delay your action? Death lies in wait for you. It may ²⁴ snatch you without delay. Can you protect yourself from this imminent end?

Suppose you were promised a hundred years' reprieve. Do you think that he who [only] feeds [his] beast of burden at the lowest point of a steep trail will succeed in completing the route with it? How great your ignorance if you believe this.

What do you think of a man who travels abroad in pursuit of knowledge and lives idly and inactive there for some years, promising himself that he will focus on his studies in his last year before returning to his country? Would you [O soul] not mock his conclusions and his belief that he can gain for himself the knowledge he craves in a short period; or, his assumption that discerning persons achieve rank, not through profound study but, solely by relying on God's munificence?

Let us suppose, then, that renewed striving at the end of a lifetime was useful and that it led to higher levels. But perhaps today is your last. Why do you not attend to it? If it occurs to you to delay, then what stymied your impulse and what is your

motivation to procrastinate? Is there any other reason besides your inability to oppose your passions because of the pain and trouble of doing so? Do you expect a day when opposition to the passions will not be trying? That day God has simply not created and never will. Paradise is surrounded by nothing but adversities. Those adversities cannot be slight for the souls that cannot be.

Do you not see how long it has been that you have been promising yourself and saying, 'Tomorrow, tomorrow!' 6 Then, tomorrow indeed arrives and becomes another day. But how do you find it? Do you not know that the morrow that arrives and becomes a day is as good as yesterday? No, today you are more impotent [than yesterday]. And tomorrow you shall be ever more impotent, because passion is like a firmly rooted tree to the eradication of which the servant should be dedicated. If he does not uproot passion because of weakness and procrastinates, he would be like someone who, unable to uproot a tree while still a vigorous youth, procrastinates to another year. However, he knows well that the longer the wait, the stronger the tree, the more firmly planted it will be and the weaker the person who uproots it. Whatever he did not do while young, he certainly will not do in old age.

On the contrary, effort makes old age vigorous, and hardship leads to disciplined alacrity. A young branch accepts to bend, but when dry and old it will not do so.

O dear soul, if you do not understand these clear matters and rely on deferment, why do you claim wisdom? What greater folly is there?

Perhaps you say: 'What prevents me from being upright is my desire for the pleasure of the passions and my impatience with pain and misfortune.' How great your foolishness and shameless your excuse! If you are sincere in this, then seek to luxuriate in passions purified of [their] perennial impurities though there be no expectation of this except in Paradise.

When you examine your passion, then examine what is opposed to it. So, take the meal that staves off the [other] meals.

What do you say about the intelligence of an ailing person whom a physician has advised to keep away from cold water for three days so he may recuperate and enjoy 28 drinking it the rest of his life? 29 He informs him that if he drank cold water he would fall chronically ill, forbidden to drink it the rest of his life.

So, what must intelligence conclude with respect to passion? Should [the person] bear up for three days for a lifetime of

enjoyment? Or, should he satisfy his passion now, fearing the pain of three days' contrariety, thereby imposing contrariety for three thousand and three hundred days? 30

Your whole life is to the blissful eternity that is proper to the denizens of Paradise and the suffering of the denizens of Hell what less than three days are to a lifetime. Would that I knew how the pain of abstaining from the passions could be greater in intensity and length than that of the lowest rungs of Hell! How could someone who cannot withstand the pain of striving bear the painful torment of God?

I see you are fainthearted about how you view your soul thanks either to a latent faithlessness or 31 a clear folly. As to the latent faithlessness, it is but the weakness of your faith in the Day of Reckoning your lack of knowledge of how great the reward or punishment will be. While clear folly is your reliance on God's nobility and pardon without awareness of His wile, His persuasiveness and His independence of your worship, and your failure to rely on His generosity for a morsel of bread, a grain of property or single word you hear from people. On the contrary, you achieve your goal in this by every stratagem. Because of this ignorance you deserve the title of foolishness from God's Messenger when he said, 'He is astute who adheres to religion and acts for what lies beyond death. He is foolish who follows the appetites of his soul and pleads his longings with God.' 3

Woe unto you, O soul, you must not let the life of this world gull you nor conceit delude you about God. Watch yourself, for your affairs concern no one else. Do not waste away your moments, for the breaths [of life] are counted. With each breath a part of you departs. Therefore, avail yourself of health before illness; leisure before engagement; wealth before poverty; youthfulness before senility; life before death. And prepare for the Hereafter in accordance with your abiding life in it.

O soul, do you not prepare for winter according to its length and accumulate for it provision, clothing, firewood and other amenities? You do not well depend on God's liberality and kindness to ward off the cold without a coat, wool or firewood, and so on, though He is capable of this.

Do you think the frostiness of Hell less bitter and briefer than the frostiness of winter? Or, do you believe the one is not the other and could never be like it? Or, that 34 they are related only in intensity and frigidity?

Do you think the servant of God will escape [Hell] without striving?

Far from it! Just as one can only ward off the cold with a coat, fire and other amenities, so the heat of the Fire and its coldness are warded off only through the fortress of God's oneness and the moat of pious deeds. God's kindness is to let you know the method of fortification and to fortune you with its amenities, not to ward off suffering for you without His citadel. Likewise, His kindness is to have created fire for warding off the coldness of winter; He has guided you to the method of drawing it with iron and rock, that you may stave off 36 the winter cold.

Likewise, too, regarding the purchase of firewood and the coat, which your Creator and Master in no wise needs. You buy [the coat] for yourself, for His creations are made for your comfort ; and the same for your pious deeds and your striving, He has no need of them. These are your way to salvation. One does good for oneself and commits evil against oneself. God has no need of anyone in this world.

Woe unto you, O soul, shed your ignorance and compare your afterlife with your present world. Your creation and your resurrection is as one soul; As We brought forth the first creation so we shall return it; 3 * you will find no change or alteration in the path of God (sunnat Allah).

Woe unto you, O soul, I see you only acquainting yourself with this world and relishing its company. Separation from [the material world] thus oppresses you as you set about to bring it nearer, confirming your love for it. Even if you are ignorant of God's punishment and reward, the terrors and circumstances of the Resurrection, do you not believe in death which would separate you from the things you love.

Do you think that someone who enters a king's abode [from one end] to exit from the other end, and casts a glance at a comely face knowing his heart will be enamoured of that face and that he will be forced to part with it should be counted among the intelligent or 4 ° among the foolish folk?

Do you not know that this world is the abode of the King of kings? 41 What is it to you but a crossing? After death, nothing in it accompanies those who must traverse it.

This is why the leader of humankind (may God bless him and grant him peace) said, 'The holy spirit has whispered into my heart, "Love whom you will, for ye shall part with him. Do what you will, you are requited for it. Live as you will, for you shall die."' 42

Woe unto you, O soul, do you know that he who is attentive to the delights of this world, familiarising himself with it, though

death is not far behind, only increases the grief of separation and unwittingly supplies himself with deadly poison.

Do you not see what people long ago built and erected but then they ran their course and vanished, and how God left their enemies to inherit their land and dwellings?

Do you not see 43 that they gathered what they could not eat, build what they could not live in and anticipated what they could not attain? 44 Each one of them 45 had built a castle raised up to the sky, but his abode is a tomb burrowed beneath the soil.

In this world is there greater foolishness and reversal than this? One cultivates his world, certain to depart from it, but when he finally reaches it his afterlife lies in ruin.

O soul, are you not ashamed to help the foolish in their folly? Even if you do not have the foresight to find your way 46 in these matters, you are predisposed by nature to imitate, to emulate. Therefore, compare the intelligence of the prophets, the learned and the sages with those who are given over to the world, If you yourself believe in intelligence and percipience, then emulate the class that seems more intelligent to you.

O soul, how amazing your dilemma, great your ignorance and manifest your tyranny! Amazing how blind you are to these clear and obvious matters! O soul, perhaps you are intoxicated by the longing for rank, too unsettled either to understand [said matters] or to consider that rank might mean merely the inclination of some people's hearts towards you.

Know that everyone on earth may well bow to you and obey you, but do you not also know that 47 after fifty years neither you nor anyone on earth who adored and bowed to you will remain. There will be a time when you will not be remembered not a single memory of you. As it is said about the kings who lived before you, Canst thou see anyone of them or hear a whisper from them? iS

O soul, how can you sell what endures forever for what can not last more than fifty years, if it survives even that? This [would be a temptation], if you were an earthly king and both east and west were handed to you, necks were bowed down to you and all matters were in order. How [great] then are your scornful lapse and mischief when all you have been granted is the domain of a shop or a house?

O soul, if out of your ignorance and sightlessness you do not renounce this world and long for the next, why then do you not renounce it out of contempt for the meanness of its associates, staying clear of its ample hardships and safeguarding against its

swift disappearance?

Why do you not refrain from its trivial things when already its greater things have forsaken you?

Why do you rejoice over a world, even when it favours you, when your country is not devoid of 5 ° those among the Jews and the Majus who vie with you over it and who surpass you in comfort and fineries? What a calamity that such trivial [people] should outstrip you!

How great your ignorance, how great your trifle preoccupation! Your opinion fails because you are loathe to place yourself with those near to God among the prophets and the righteous. With proximity to the Lord of the worlds there is everlasting eternity. But you shall rank with those in the footsteps of ignorant fools for scant days. Pity on you that you should lose both world and faith.

Rush on, O soul, for you are on the verge of ruin! Death approaches you and the warning has come. A Who then will pray for you after your passing? Who will fast for you after death? And who will propitiate your Lord?

Woe unto you, O soul, what should matter to you is that your days are numbered? They are your only merchandise. You have traded and lost most of them, and were you to lament for the rest of your days over your losses, you would leave yourself short. What if you were to lose the remainder, having persisted in your habit?

Do you not know that death is your appointed time? That the grave is your home, dust your blanket and the worm your intimate? The greatest terror lies before you.

O soul, do you not know that the soldiers of death are upon you, waiting for you at the city gate? 51 They are sworn 52 by a solemn oath that they will not leave their positions before they take you with them.

O soul, do you not know that [those who have died] wish to be granted a day's return to this world in order to set aright 53 what has eluded them? They wish to be in your place. If they could, they would buy one day of your life in exchange for the entire world. Meanwhile, you squander your days through negligence and idleness.

Woe unto you, O soul, are you not ashamed? You adorn your exterior for people and contend with God in secret with terrible sins. So, do you feel shame in front of people but not

God? Is He less important than those gawking at you?

Do you bid people to be good when you are blemished by vices? Do you summon towards God but flee from Him, remind [others] of God but forget Him?

O soul, do you not know that the guilty are more putrid than excrement? And that excrement cannot be cleaned by excrement? Why then do you desire the purity of others when you yourself are unclean?

Woe unto you, O soul, if you truly understood yourself, you would know that people are afflicted only because of the misfortune of you. A

Woe unto you, O soul, you made yourself an ass for Iblis, who leads you wherever he wills and subjugates you. Despite this, you admire your deeds, even if they are filled with harm.

How can you admire your deeds in view of the number of your sins and lapses? God cursed Iblis for a single sin A even after he had worshipped Him for two hundred thousand years . Adam was expelled by God from the garden for one sin, although he was His prophet and regent.

Woe unto you, O soul, how deceitful you are! How impudent!

And woe unto you, O soul, how ignorant you are! How bold in sin! Woe to how you believe then violate! How you promise then betray ! 55

Woe unto you, O soul, are you bent on building your world with these sins, as if you shall never leave it? Do you not see how the people of the grave once were? They had accumulated much, built high up, harboured hopes far and wide. Yet fallow is their accumulation. Their structures are tombs, their hopes delusions.

Woe unto you, O soul, have you given them any consideration? Have you given a glance? Do you think that they were called to the Hereafter and believe yourself immortal? Far from it, far from it! What you imagine is false. Ever since you came out of your mother's womb your life has been waning. So, build your castle on the face of the earth [the earth's] bosom shall soon be your grave .

Have you no fear of when the soul will reach the collarbone , when the messengers of your Lord shall come to you in dark colours, gloomy faces and tidings about torment? Would regret benefit you then? Would grief be accepted from you, would you

be spared the tears?

O soul, the wonder of all wonders, withal, is that you lay claim to insight and cleverness. In your cleverness you rejoice at the growth of your wealth but grieve not at the diminution of your life. Of what benefit is increased wealth with diminished life?

Woe unto you, O soul, you turn away from the Hereafter but it draws closer to you; you approach the world while it turns away from you.

How many a man faces the day never to finish it? How many a man expects the morrow but never reaches it? You witness this among your brethren, your kin and your neighbours. Observe their distress at death and then you will not return to your folly.

Beware, O hapless soul, a day when He pledges not to spare a servant to whom He had enjoined [the good] and forbidden [the evil] in this world the questioning about his deeds whether important or trifling, overt or covert.

O soul, watch with what body you shall stand before God and with what tongue you shall answer, and be prepared with an answer to the question and for correctness in your answer. In the life that remains before you act during the short days for [the sake of] long days; [act] in the ephemeral abode for the abode of Resurrection; in the abode of sorrow and hardship 57 for that of ease and eternal life. Act before you are no longer [able] to act.

Leave the world by choice, as the free do, before you must leave it by necessity. Rejoice not in what splendours you are for tuned with in this world. Many a man is happy but cheated; many a man is cheated unawares. Woe to the person who will suffer a calamity but is unaware of it, laughing and rejoicing, cheering and frittering away, eating and drinking. In God's book he has earned [the name] 'fuel for the fire'.

O soul, let your gaze upon the world be admonishment, your seeking it out only from necessity, your rejection of [the world] a choice, your pursuit of the Hereafter an anticipation.

Be not of those who are incapable of gratitude for what they receive, who strive to increase what they keep, who forbid other people but not themselves.

O soul, know that religion has no replacement, faith no substitute and the body no other. The person for whom the night and the day are his mount journeys along though he himself moves not .

O soul, take counsel from this admonition accept this advice. He who shuns the admonition is content with the Fire. And 59 how I find you content with the Fire and oblivious to the admonition! If hardness [of heart] prevents you from accepting admonition, then avail yourself against it by perpetual night vigil and prayer. If it persists, then persevere with the fast . If it persists then, reduce both company and conversation. If it has not ceased, then by [goodness] to kin (silat al-arham) and by kindness to orphans. If it continues further, know that God has sealed and closed your heart, for your heart will have accumulated the darkness of sin in both its interior and exterior.

Therefore, accustom yourself to the Fire. For God has created Paradise and its denizens, and He created Hellfire and its denizens. Each is destined for what he was created for . If you have no more place for admonition, then despair for your soul. [Yet,] despair is one of the most mortal sins , may God keep us from it. When the path of goodness is blocked for you, you may neither despair nor hope .

[In your case], it is delusion, not a hope. But see if you are not overtaken by grief at the misfortune that has befallen you, and whether your eye permits a tear of mercy from you upon your soul . If so, [then know that] the source of tears is the ocean of mercy; and that there remains in you a place for hope. So, persist in your wailing and weeping. Seek aid from the Most Merciful of the merciful; complain to the Kindliest of the kind. Take to seeking aid and do not weary of long complaint [against yourself] and God may yet relieve your weakness and assist you .

For, your misfortune deepens, your calamities worsen, your duration [in affliction] lengthens, your excuses expire and your pleas are withdrawn 66 in short, no escape or quest, no appeal for help or sanctuary, refuge or haven , save in your Protector then seek asylum with Him by entreaty. Be humble in your entreaty in proportion to the magnitude of your ignorance and the number of your sins. For He is merciful to the lowly petitioner, aids the eager beseecher and answers the call of the destitute.

Today you come to Him destitute and needful of His mercy, your means are narrow, your path blocked. Your strength is gone and admonitions do not benefit you no reproach curbs you. Yet, the One asked is generous, the One beseeched is kind, the One appealed to is benevolent and gentle. Mercy is wide, graciousness abundant and pardon complete.

Following the example of Adam your Father, say [O soul],
'O Most Merciful of the merciful, O Compassionate, O Granter of Mercy, O Gentle One, O Great One, O Kind One I am

the inveterate sinner, the reckless one who knows no abstinence, the profligate with no shame . This is the station of the humble petitioner, wretchedly poor and miserably weak, drowning and doomed. Hasten to my succour, give me repose, show me the effects of Your mercy. Let me taste the coolness of Your forgiveness. Bestow upon me the power of Your protection, O Most Merciful of the merciful.'

As Wahb b. Munabbih said, 'When God caused Adam to descend to earth from the Garden , Adam's tears did not cease to flow. So, on the seventh day, while he was grief-stricken, dispirited and embittered, his head bowed, God Exalted apprised him saying, "O Adam, what troubles you so?"' 7 °

'He said, "Lord, my misfortune is great, my sin envelopes me and I have left the Kingdom of my Lord and come to be in the Abode of Disgrace after [knowing] dignity; in the Abode of Misery after felicity; in the Abode of Hardship after repose; in the Abode of Scourge after health; in the Abode of Transience after constancy; in the Abode of Death and Extinction after eternal life and immortality. How can I not lament my sin?"'

'God inspired him, "O Adam, have I not chosen thee for Myself, permitted you My Kingdom, marked you for honour from Me and warned you about My wrath? Have I not created you with My own hands, blown My spirit into you and made My angels prostrate themselves before you? And yet you disobeyed My command, forgot My pledge and exposed yourself to My wrath ? 71 By My Might and Majesty, if the earth were filled with men all like thee, worshipping, exalting, then disobeying Me, I would bring them down to the abodes of the rebellious!" Upon this Adam (peace be upon him) wept for three hundred years .' 3

' Ubayd Allah al-Bajili used to weep often. While he wept all night he would say, 'Lord, I am one whose sins increase as my life lengthens. I am the one who, resolving to renounce a sinful act, meets yet another impulse. "Woe to you, O 'Ubayd, a sin is not over when its author seeks another. And, woe to you, O c Ubayd, if the Fire will be your resting place and a shelter. Woe to you, O 'Ubayd, if the striking rods are being prepared for your head. Woe to you, O 'Ubayd, while the requests of seekers are required , yours may not be.'"

Said Mansur b. Ammar, 'One night in Kufa I heard a person whispering to his Lord, "Lord, by Your might, I have no wish to disobey or dispute Thee. When I disobeyed Thee, I did so not out of disregard for Thy rank, nor out of objection to Thy punishment, nor out of belittling Thy sight; my soul entices me, my misfortune abetted me in this, and the veil of Thy protection beguiled me. I disobeyed Thee with my ignorance, contradicted

Thee with my deeds. Who will rescue me now from Thy torment?
Whose rope should I clasp, if Ye should withhold Thy rope
from me?

“O my calamity that I should stand before Thee tomorrow,
when the unburdened are told to pass and the overburdened 74 are
told to disembark. Shall I pass with the unburdened or disembark
with the overburdened?

“Woe to me! The more I age, the greater my sins. Woe to me!
The longer I live, the more numerous my acts of disobedience.
How long will I repent , how long will I repeat? Have I not a
moment to feel shame before my Lord ?”

These, then, are the ways of the Folk* j n private prayer
(munajat) with their Protector and in the censuring of their souls.
Through private prayer they seek reconciliation, while the
purpose of their self-censure is instruction and observance. He who
neglects self-censure and private prayer has failed himself he
verges on losing God’s satisfaction with him.

Thus ends the Book of Vigilance and Self-Examination and it is
the eighth book of the Quarter of Saving Virtues of the Revival
of the Religious Sciences. Praise be to God alone, His blessings and
peace upon our master Muhammad and his household.

A Qawm is translated here as ‘Folk’, it refers to the Sufis.